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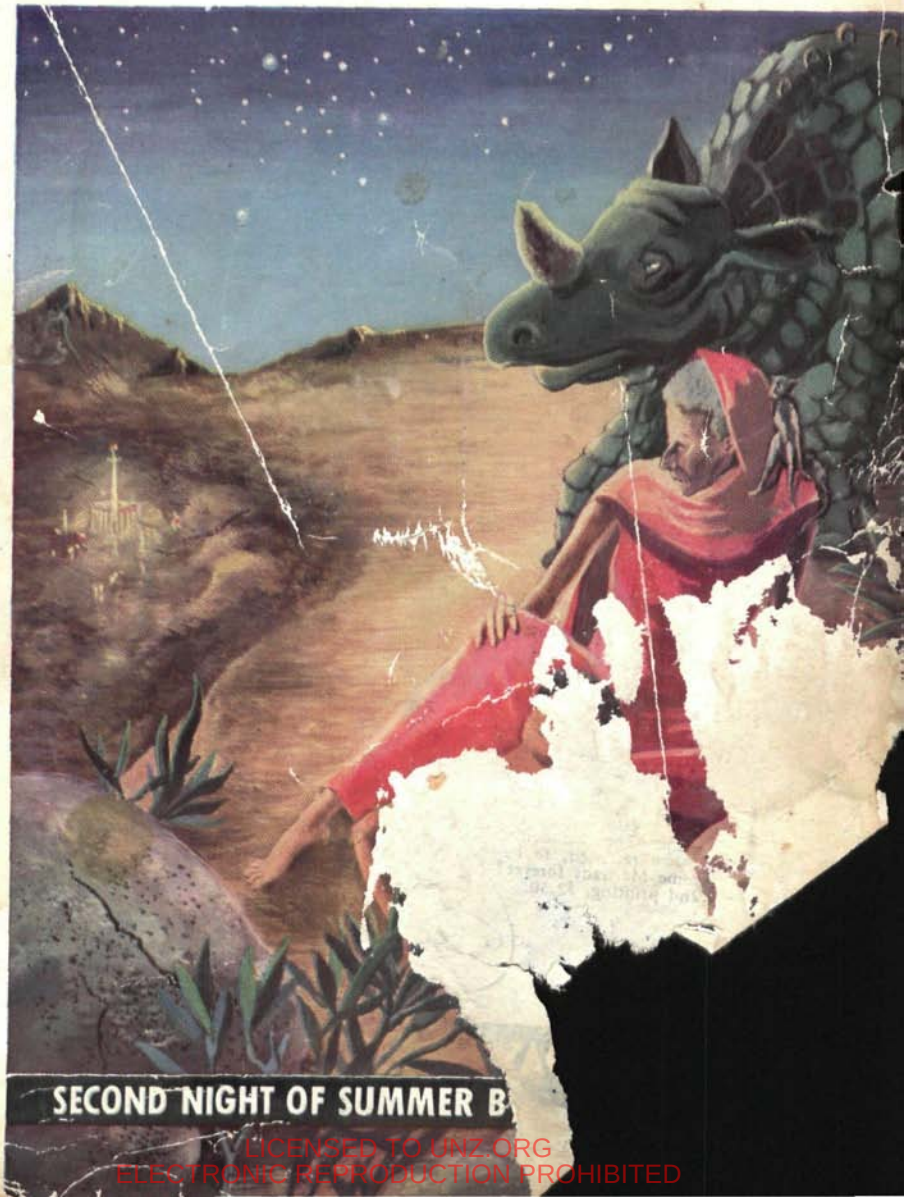

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

December, 1950 Vol. 1, No. 3

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Next issue at your newsstand first week in December

Printed in the U. S. A. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

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Let's Talk It Over

AS WE go to press, the first issue of GALAXY *Science Fiction* has been on sale three weeks, yet newsstands report sellouts, and mail response has been enormous in volume and encouragement. Each suggestion has been carefully examined and, even at this early date, reader preferences are beginning to assume clear outline:

● Cover design and format are approved. There were some requests to remove the bottom band, where the story or author lineup is given, but this would mean surprinting on the painting. See next issue before voting.

● Cover treatment will have to wait until the results of our second and third cover experiments are evaluated. The first (done in analine, by the way, not pastel, as some seemed to think) deliberately subordinated the figures to the harsh landscape, a technique used by Utrillo and other great artists of our time. Sibley, who did the second cover, used the opposite approach. The present one, by Hunter, again is an artist's solution, which would, of course, have been handled differently as illustration. We won't stop evolving. Tabled.

● One lone and evidently lonely man asked for nudes. Outvoted.

● Interior art has to be regarded on the basis of several issues. Stone and Callé have been called back into service, which effectively removes them from the argument. Back to committee.

● The vote thus far is vastly in favor of serials; any turnout of the opposition will have to be more than a lobby. Passed.

● Not enough have indicated approval of three installments of serials. Referred to constituents.

● Some authors plumped for story rating; readers in general gave no opinion. My feeling is that ratings overlook the need for editorial balance—light shorts to balance grimmer novelets, for example, or the other way around. But it's not too much trouble to rate stories if you want it. Tabled.

● Sentiment is unclear on articles. We are skipping one in the next issue to sample the reaction.

● Using author's names at the end of their stories created an odd situation. Some objected without explaining why. Others liked not having to look up the author's name, either on the contents page or story opening. One reader thought it was somehow very clever. None of this was in my mind when I happened on the device; I just wanted to indicate The End without using those coldly final words, though I did realize it

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would make identification of the authors easier. Other editors seem very willing to borrow it. Should we give it up by default? Referendum.

● GALAXY'S Five Star Shelf has been cheered by those who mention it, rather a large number. Passed.

● Not a single person has argued against editorials, which is a big shock for me. I personally question their value in a fiction magazine and have used these pages only to fashion GALAXY *Science Fiction* in the shape you desire. But when that's done, what then? Do I borrow a lab smock and articles from science journals? Appeal to voters.

● Final and most startling point is the letter department. There is evidently a greater reader dislike of mail columns than I had sensed. The objection, in fact, was so vociferous that I am hastily putting off action until more counties have a chance to be heard. The brief states that the space would be more gainfully employed for fiction. It's a point . . . but is it shared by the majority? Standing vote.

THE bulk of subscriptions, and it can really be spoken of as bulk, was for both GALAXY *Science Fiction* and GALAXY *Science Fiction* Novels, showing decided interest in old as well as new stories. "The Legion of Space" by Jack Williamson is the current selection for reprint, but future titles have not been chosen at this writing. What books would you like to see reprinted? None, by the way, will be reprints of books that have already appeared at 25¢.

Speaking of subscriptions, we have a rather gigantic offer for Christmas. For this purpose, two ads have been placed back to back, so that the coupons can be clipped without mutilating the book. But those purists and collectors who wouldn't cut out even a deliberately arranged page can send in any kind of order sheet. The coupons are there for your convenience, not ours. Use anything, but subscribe . . . and take the opportunity to introduce others to your favorite type of fiction at this really generous saving.

You might note also that we have a limited number of Volume I Numbers 1 and 2. You can either buy them singly or start subscriptions with them. They're real collector's items. Better than stamps; at least you have something to read.

Not at all incidentally, we have raised our word rates to the highest in science fiction. If any authors have missed that announcement through writers' magazines and agents, this should serve as notice. We want the best and are prepared to pay for it.

How do we do it? By aiming for the biggest audience of any science fiction magazine . . . with your help.

—H. L. GOLD

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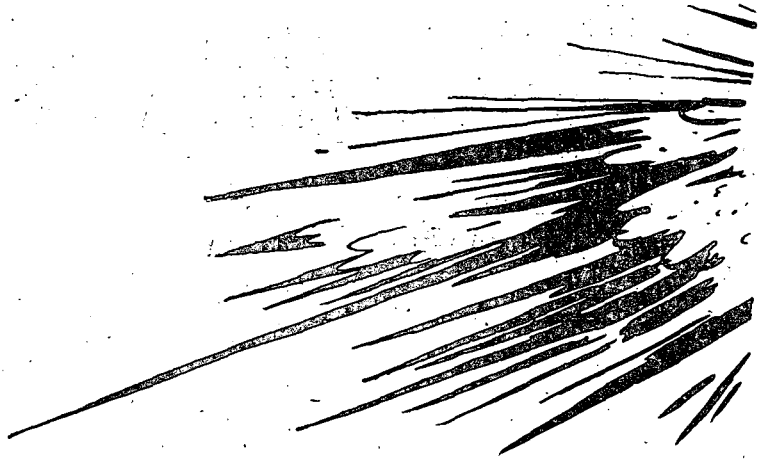
Second

Throwing a person to the wolves to save the rest is never a pleasant solution. In this case it was an entire world!

ON THE night after the day that brought summer officially to the land of Wend, on the planet of Noorhut, the shining lights were seen again in the big hollow at the east end of Grimp's father's farm.

Grimp watched them for more than an hour from his upstairs room. The house was dark, but an occasional murmur of voices floated up to him through the windows below. Everyone in the farmhouse was looking at the lights.

On the other farms around and in the village, which was over a hill and another two miles up the valley, every living soul who could get within view of the hollow was probably doing the same. For a time, the agitated yelling of the Village Guardian's big pank-hound had sounded clearly over the hill, but he had quieted down then very suddenly—or had *been* quieted down, more likely, Grimp suspected. The Guardian was dead-set against anyone making a fuss about



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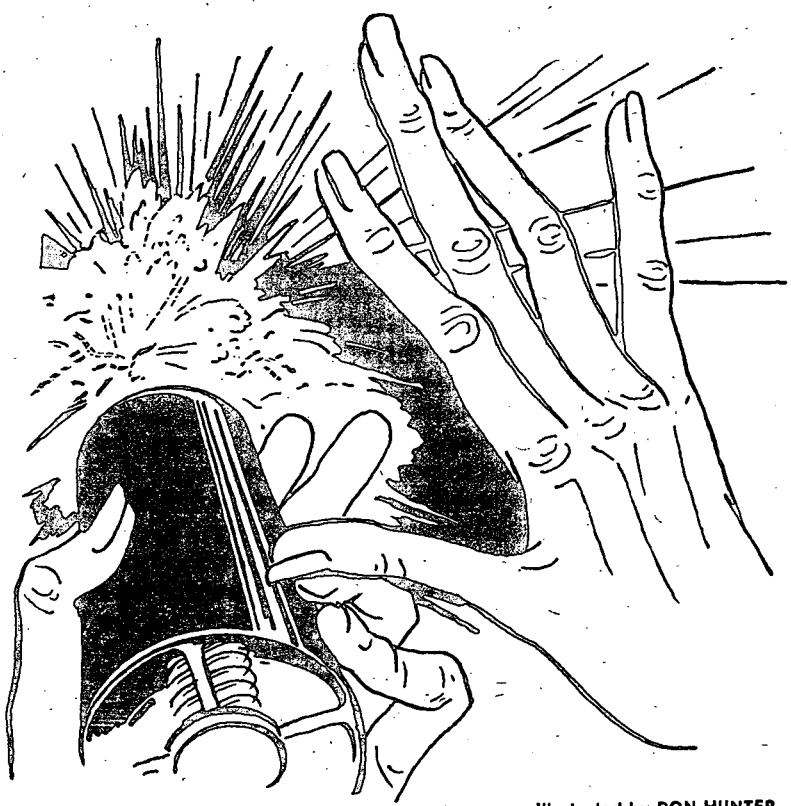
Night of Summer

BY JAMES H. SCHMITZ



Illustrated by DON HUNTER

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the lights—and that included the pank-hound, too.

There was some excuse for the pank-hound's excitement, though. From the window, Grimp could see there were a lot more lights tonight than had turned up in previous years—big, brilliant-blue bubbles, drifting and rising and falling silently all about the hollow. Sometimes one would lift straight up for several hundred feet, or move off over the edge of the hollow for about the same distance, and hang there suspended for a few minutes, before floating back to the others. That was as far as they ever went away from the hollow.

There was, in fact, no need for the Halpa detector-globes to go any farther than that to get the information wanted by those who had sent them out, and who were listening now to the steady flow of brief reports, in some Halpa equivalent of human speech-thought, coming back to them through the globes:

"No signs of hostile activity in the vicinity of the breakthrough point. No weapons or engines of power within range of detection. The area shows no significant alterations since the last investigation. Sharp curiosity among those who observe us consciously—traces of alarm and suspicion. But no overt hostility."

The reports streamed on without interruption, repeating the same bits of information automatically and incessantly, while the globes floated and dipped soundlessly above and about the hollow.

Grimp continued to watch them, blinking sleepily now and then, until a spreading glow over the edge of the valley announced that Noorhut's Big Moon was coming up slowly, like a Planetary Guardian, to make its own inspection of the lights. The globes began to dim out then, just as they always had done at moonrise in the preceding summers; and even before the top rim of the Big Moon's yellow disk edged over the hills, the hollow was completely dark.

Grimp heard his mother starting up the stairs. He got hurriedly into bed. The show was over for the night and he had a lot of pleasant things to think about before he went to sleep.

Now that the lights had showed up, his good friend Grandma Erisa Wannattel and her patent-medicine trailer were sure to arrive, too. Sometime late tomorrow afternoon, the big draft-trailer would come rolling up the valley road from the city. For that was what Grandma Wannattel had done the past four summers—ever since the lights first started appearing above the hollow for the few nights they were to be seen there each year. And since four years were exactly half of Grimp's whole life, that made Grandma's return a mathematical certainty for him.

Other people, of course, like the Village Guardian, might have a

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poor opinion of Grandma, but just hanging around her and the trailer and the gigantic, exotic-looking rhinocerine pony that pulled it was, in Grimp's opinion, a lot better even than going to the circus.

And vacations started the day after tomorrow! The whole future just now, in fact, looked like one good thing after another, extending through a vista of summery infinities.

Grimp went to sleep happily.

AT ABOUT the same hour, though at a distance greater than Grimp's imagination had stretched as yet, eight large ships came individually out of the darkness between the stars that was their sea, and began to move about Noorhut in a carefully timed pattern of orbits. They stayed much too far out to permit any instrument of space-detection to suspect that Noorhut might be their common center of interest.

But that was what it was. Though the men who crewed the eight ships bore the people of Noorhut no ill will, hardly anything could have looked less promising for Noorhut than the cargo they had on board.

Seven of them were armed with a gas which was not often used any more. A highly volatile lethal catalyst, it sank to the solid surface of a world over which it was freed and spread out swiftly there to the point where its presence could no longer be detected by any chemical means. However, its effect of drawing the final breath almost imperceptibly out of all things that were oxygen-breathing was not noticeably reduced by diffusion.

The eighth ship was equipped with a brace of torpedoes, which were normally released some hours after the gas-carriers dispersed their invisible death. They were quite small torpedoes, since the only task remaining for them would be to ignite the surface of the planet that had been treated with the catalyst.

All those things might presently happen to Noorhut. But they would happen only if a specific message was flashed from it to the circling squadron—the message that Noorhut already was lost to a deadly foe who must, at any cost now, be prevented from spreading out from it to other inhabited worlds.

NEXT afternoon, right after school, as Grimp came expectantly around the bend of the road at the edge of the farm, he found the village policeman sitting there on a rock, gazing tearfully down the road.

"Hello, Runny," said Grimp, disturbed. Considered in the light of gossip he'd overhead in the village that morning, this didn't look so good for Grandma. It just didn't look good.

The policeman blew his nose on a handkerchief he carried tucked into the front of his uniform,

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wiped his eyes, and gave Grimp an annoyed glance.

"Don't *you* call me Runny, Grimp!" he said, replacing the handkerchief. Like Grimp himself and most of the people on Noorhut, the policeman was brown-skinned and dark-eyed, normally a rather good-looking young fellow. But his eyes were swollen and red-rimmed now; and his nose, which was a bit larger than average, anyway, was also red and swollen and undeniably runny. He had hay-fever.

Grimp apologized and sat down thoughtfully on the rock beside the policeman, who was one of his numerous cousins, most of the families of Noorhut being somehow related. He was about to mention that he had overheard Vellit using the expression when she and the policeman came through the big Leeth-flower orchard above the farm the other evening—at a much less leisurely rate than was their custom there. But he thought better of it. Vellit was the policeman's girl for most of the year, but she broke their engagement regularly during hay-fever season and called him cousin instead of dearest.

"What are you doing here?" Grimp asked bluntly instead.

"Waiting," said the policeman.

"For what?" said Grimp, with a sinking heart.

"Same individual you are, I guess," the policeman told him, hauling out the handkerchief again. He blew. "This year she's going to go right back where she came from or get pinched."

"Who says so?" scowled Grimp.

"The Guardian, that's who," said the policeman. "That good enough for you?"

"He can't do it!" Grimp said hotly. "It's our farm, and she's got all her licenses."

"He's had a whole year to think up a new list she's got to have," the policeman informed him. He fished in the breast-pocket of his uniform, pulled out a folded paper and opened it. "He put thirty-four items down here I got to check—she's bound to miss on one of them."

"It's a dirty trick!" said Grimp, rapidly scanning as much as he could see of the list.

"Let's us have more respect for the Village Guardian, Grimp!" the policeman said warningly.

"Uh-huh," muttered Grimp. "Sure . . ." If Runny would just move his big thumb out of the way. But what a list! Trailer; rhinocerine pony (beast, heavy draft, imported); patent medicines; household utensils; fortune-telling; pets; herbs; miracle-healing—

The policeman looked down, saw what Grimp was doing and raised the paper out of his line of vision. "That's an official document," he said, warding Grimp off with one hand and tucking the paper away with the other. "Let's us not get our dirty hands on it."

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Grimp was thinking fast. Grandma Wannattel did have framed licenses for some of the items he'd read hanging around inside the trailer, but certainly not thirty-four of them.

"Remember that big skinless werret I caught last season?" he asked.

The policeman gave him a quick glance, looked away again and wiped his eyes thoughtfully. The season on werrets would open the following week and he was as ardent a fisherman as anyone in the village—and last summer Grimp's monster werret had broken a twelve-year record in the valley.

"Some people," Grimp said idly, staring down the valley road to the point where it turned into the woods, "would sneak after a person for days who's caught a big werret, hoping he'd be dumb enough to go back to that pool."

The policeman flushed and dabbed the handkerchief gingerly at his nose.

"Some people would even sit in a haystack and use spyglasses, even when the hay made them sneeze like crazy," continued Grimp quietly.

The policeman's flush deepened. He sneezed.

"But a person isn't that dumb," said Grimp. "Not when he knows there's anyway two werrets there six inches bigger than the one he caught."

"Six inches?" the policeman repeated a bit incredulously—eagerly.

"Easy," nodded Grimp. "I had a look at them again last week."

It was the policeman's turn to think. Grimp idly hauled out his slingshot, fished a pebble out of his small-pebble pocket and knocked the head off a flower twenty feet away. He yawned negligently.

"You're pretty good with that slingshot," the policeman remarked. "You must be just about as good as the culprit that used a slingshot to ring the fire-alarm signal on the defense unit bell from the top of the schoolhouse last week."

"That'd take a pretty good shot," Grimp admitted.

"And who then," continued the policeman, "dropped pepper in his trail, so the pank-hound near coughed off his head when we started to track him. The Guardian," he added significantly, "would like to have a clue about that culprit, all right."

"Sure, sure," said Grimp, bored. The policeman, the Guardian, and probably even the pank-hound, knew exactly who the culprit was; but they wouldn't be able to prove it in twenty thousand years. Runny just had to realize first that threats weren't going to get him anywhere near a record werret.

Apparently, he had; he was settling back for another bout of thinking. Grimp, interested in what he would produce next, decided just to leave him to it. . . .

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Then Grimp jumped up suddenly from the rock.

"There they are!" he yelled, waving the slingshot.

A half-mile down the road, Grandma Wannattel's big, silvery trailer had come swaying out of the woods behind the rhinocerine pony and turned up toward the farm. The pony saw Grimp, lifted its head, which was as long as a tall man, and bawled a thunderous greeting. Grandma Wannattel stood up on the driver's seat and waved a green silk handkerchief.

Grimp started sprinting down the road.

The werrets should turn the trick—but he'd better get Grandma informed, just the same, about recent developments here, before she ran into Runny.

GRANDMA WANNATTEL flicked the pony's horny rear with the reins just before they reached the policeman, who was waiting at the side of the road with the Guardian's check-list unfolded in his hand.

The pony broke into a lumbering trot, and the trailer swept past Runny and up around the bend of the road, where it stopped well within the boundaries of the farm. They climbed down and Grandma quickly unhitched the pony. It waddled, grunting, off the road and down into the long, marshy meadow above the hollow. It stood still there, cooling its feet.

Grimp felt a little better. Getting the trailer off community property gave Grandma a technical advantage. Grimp's people had a favorable opinion of her, and they were a sturdy lot who enjoyed telling off the Guardian any time he didn't actually have a law to back up his orders. But on the way to the farm, she had confessed to Grimp that, just as he'd feared, she didn't have anything like thirty-four licenses. And now the policeman was coming up around the bend of the road after them, blowing his nose and frowning.

"Just let me handle him alone," Grandma told Grimp out of the corner of her mouth.

He nodded and strolled off into the meadow to pass the time with the pony. She'd had a lot of experience in handling policemen.

"Well, well, young man," he heard her greeting his cousin behind him. "That looks like a bad cold you've got."

The policeman sneezed.

"Wish it were a cold," he said resignedly. "It's hay-fever. Can't do a thing with it. Now I've got a list here—"

"Hay-fever?" said Grandma. "Step up into the trailer a moment. We'll fix that."

"About this list—" began Runny, and stopped. "You think you got something that would fix it?" he asked skeptically. "I've been to I don't know how many doctors and they didn't help any."

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"Doctors!" said Grandma. Grimp heard her heels click up the metal steps that led into the back of the trailer. "Come right in, won't take a moment."

"Well—" said Runny doubtfully, but he followed her inside.

Grimp winked at the pony. The first round went to Grandma.

"Hello, pony," he said.

His worries couldn't reduce his appreciation of Grandma's fabulous draft-animal. Partly, of course, it was just that it was such an enormous beast. The long, round barrel of its body rested on short legs with wide, flat feet which were settled deep in the meadow's mud by now. At one end was a spiky tail, and at the other a very big, wedge-shaped head, with a blunt, badly chipped horn set between nose and eyes. From nose to tail and all around, it was covered with thick, rectangular, horny plates, a mottled green-brown in color. It weighed as much as a long-extinct terrestrial elephant, but that was because it was only a pony.

Grimp patted its rocky side affectionately. He loved the pony most for being the ugliest thing that had ever showed up on Noorhut. According to Grandma, she had bought it from a bankrupt circus which had imported it from a planet called Treebel; and Treebel was supposed to be a world full of hot swamps, inexhaustibly explosive volcanoes and sulphurous stenches.

One might have thought that after wandering around melting lava and under rainfalls of glowing ashes for most of its life, the pony would have considered Noorhut pretty tame. But though there wasn't much room for expression around the solid slab of bone supporting the horn, which was the front of its face, Grimp thought it looked thoroughly contented with its feet sunk out of sight in Noorhut's cool mud.

"You're a big fat pig!" he told it fondly.

The pony slobbered out a long, purple tongue and carefully parted his hair.

"Cut it out!" said Grimp. "Ugh!"

The pony snorted, pleased, curled its tongue about a huge clump of weeds, pulled them up and flipped them into its mouth, roots, mud and all. It began to chew.

Grimp glanced at the sun and turned anxiously to study the trailer. If she didn't get rid of Runny soon, they'd be calling him back to the house for supper before he and Grandma got around to having a good talk. And they weren't letting him out of doors these evenings, while the shining lights were here.

He gave the pony a parting whack, returned quietly to the road and sat down out of sight near the back door of the trailer, where he could hear what was going on.

". . . so about the only thing the Guardian could tack on you

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now," the policeman was saying, "would be a Public Menace charge. If there's any trouble about the lights this year, he's likely to try that. He's not a bad Guardian, you know, but he's got himself talked into thinking you're sort of to blame for the lights showing up here every year."

Grandma chuckled. "Well, I try to get here in time to see them every summer," she admitted. "I can see how that might give him the idea."

"And of course," said the policeman, "we're all trying to keep it quiet about them. If the news got out, we'd be having a lot of people coming here from the city, just to look. No one but the Guardian minds you being here, only you don't want a lot of city people tramping around your farms."

"Of course not," agreed Grandma. "And I certainly haven't told anyone about them myself."

"Last night," the policeman added, "everyone was saying there were twice as many lights this year as last summer. That's what got the Guardian so excited."

Chafing more every minute, Grimp had to listen then to an extended polite argument about how much Runny wanted to pay Grandma for her hay-fever medicines, while she insisted he didn't owe her anything at all. In the end, Grandma lost and the policeman paid up—much too much to take from any friend of Grimp's folks, Grandma protested to the last. And then, finally, that righteous minion of the law came climbing down the trailer steps again, with Grandma following him to the door.

"How do I look, Grimp?" he beamed cheerfully as Grimp stood up.

"Like you ought to wash your face sometime," Grimp said tactlessly, for he was fast losing patience with Runny. But then his eyes widened in surprise.

Under a coating of yellowish grease, Runny's nose seemed to have returned almost to the shape it had out of hay-fever season, and his eyelids were hardly puffed at all! Instead of flaming red, those features, furthermore, now were only a delicate pink in shade. Runny, in short, was almost handsome again.

"Pretty good, eh?" he said. "Just one shot did it. And I've only got to keep the salve on another hour. Isn't that right, Grandma?"

"That's right," smiled Grandma from the door, clinking Runny's money gently out of one hand into the other. "You'll be as good as new then."

"Permanent cure, too," said Runny. He patted Grimp benevolently on the head. "And next week we go werret-fishing, eh, Grimp?" he added greedily.

"I guess so," Grimp said, with a trace of coldness. It was his opinion that Runny could have been satisfied with the hay-fever cure and forgotten about the werrets.

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"It's a date!" nodded Runny happily and took his greasy face whistling down the road. Grimp scowled after him, half-minded to reach for the slingshot then and there and let go with a medium stone at the lower rear of the uniform. But probably he'd better not.

"Well, that's that," Grandma said softly.

At that moment, up at the farmhouse, a cow horn went "Whoop-whoop!" across the valley.

"Darn," said Grimp. "I knew it was getting late, with him doing all that talking! Now they're calling me to supper." There were tears of disappointment in his eyes.

"Don't let it fuss you, Grimp," Grandma said consolingly. "Just jump up in here a moment and close your eyes."

Grimp jumped up into the trailer and closed his eyes expectantly.

"Put out your hands," Grandma's voice told him.

He put out his hands, and she pushed them together to form a cup. Then something small and light and furry dropped into them, caught hold of one of Grimp's thumbs, with tiny, cool fingers, and chittered.

Grimp's eyes popped open.

"It's a lortel!" he whispered, overwhelmed.

"It's for you!" Grandma beamed.

Grimp couldn't speak. The lortel looked at him from a tiny, black, human face with large blue eyes set in it, wrapped a long, furry tail twice around his wrist, clung to his thumb with its fingers, and grinned and squeaked.

"It's wonderful!" gasped Grimp. "Can you really teach them to talk?"

"Hello," said the lortel.

"That's all it can say so far," Grandma said. "But if you're patient with it, it'll learn more."

"I'll be patient," Grimp promised, dazed. "I saw one at the circus this winter, down the valley at Laggand. They said it could talk, but it never said anything while I was there."

"Hello!" said the lortel.

"Hello!" gulped Grimp.

The cow horn whoop-whooped again.

"I guess you'd better run along to supper, or they might get mad," said Grandma.

"I know," said Grimp. "What does it eat?"

"Bugs and flowers and honey and fruit and eggs, when it's wild. But you just feed it whatever you eat yourself."

"Well, good-by," said Grimp. "And golly—thanks, Grandma."

He jumped out of the trailer. The lortel climbed out of his hand, ran up his arm and sat on his shoulder, wrapping its tail around his neck.

"It knows you already," Grandma said. "It won't run away."

Grimp reached up carefully with his other hand and patted the lortel.

"I'll be back early tomorrow,"

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he said. "No school. . . . They won't let me out after supper as long as those lights keep coming around."

The cow horn whooped for the third time, very loudly. This time it meant business.

"Well, good-by," Grimp repeated hastily. He ran off, the lortel hanging on to his shirt collar and squeaking.

Grandma looked after him and then at the sun, which had just touched the tops of the hills with its lower rim.

"Might as well have some supper myself," she remarked, apparently to no one in particular. "But after that I'll have to run out the go-buggy and create a diversion."

Lying on its armor-plated belly down in the meadow, the pony swung its big head around toward her. Its small yellow eyes blinked questioningly.

"What makes you think a diversion will be required?" its voice asked into her ear. The ability to produce such ventriloquial effects was one of the talents that made the pony well worth its considerable keep to Grandma.

"Weren't you listening?" she scolded. "That policeman told me the Guardian's planning to march the village's defense unit up to the hollow after supper, and start them shooting at the Halpa detector-globes as soon as they show up."

The pony swore an oath meaningless to anyone who hadn't been raised on the planet Treebel. It stood up, braced itself, and began pulling its feet out of the mud in a succession of loud, sucking noises.

"I haven't had an hour's straight rest since you talked me into tramping around with you eight years ago!" it complained.

"But you've certainly been seeing life, like I promised," Grandma smiled.

The pony slopped in a last, enormous tongueful of wet weeds. "That I have!" it said, with emphasis.

It came chewing up to the road.

"I'll keep a watch on things while you're having your supper," it told her.

AS THE uniformed twelve-man defense unit marched in good order out of the village, on its way to assume a strategic position around the hollow on Grimp's father's farm, there was a sudden, small explosion not very far off.

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The Guardian, who was marching in the lead with a gun over his shoulder and the slavering pank-hound on a leash, stopped short. The unit broke ranks and crowded up behind him.

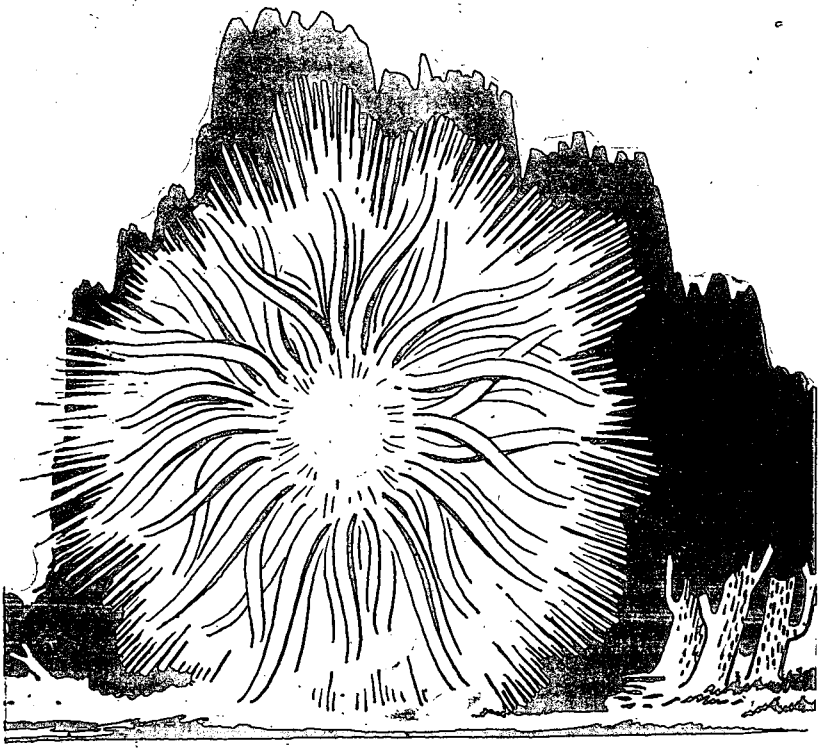
"What was that?" the Guardian inquired.

Everybody glanced questioningly around the rolling green slopes of the valley, already darkened with evening shadows. The pank-hound sat down before the Guardian, pointed its nose at the even darker shadows in the woods ahead of them and growled.

"Look!" a man said, pointing in the same direction.

A spark of bright green light had appeared on their path, just where it entered the woods. The spark grew rapidly in size, became as big as a human head—then bigger! Smoky green streamers seemed to be pouring out of it. . . .

"I'm going home right now," someone announced at that point, sensibly enough.



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"Stand your g r o u n d!" the Guardian ordered, conscious of the beginnings of a general withdrawal movement behind him. He was an old soldier. He unslung his gun, cocked it and pointed it. The pank-hound got up on his six feet and bristled.

"Stop!" the Guardian shouted at the green light.

It expanded promptly to the size of a barrel, new streamers shooting out from it and fanning about like hungry tentacles.

He fired.

"Run!" everybody yelled then. The pank-hound slammed backward against the Guardian's legs, upsetting him, and streaked off after the retreating unit. The green light had spread outward jerkily into the shape of something like a many-armed, writhing starfish, almost the size of the trees about it. Deep, hooting sounds came out of it as it started drifting down the path toward the Guardian.

He got up on one knee and, in a single drumroll of sound, emptied all thirteen charges remaining in his gun into the middle of the starfish. It hooted more loudly, waved its arms more wildly, and continued to advance.

He stood up quickly then, slung the gun over his shoulder and joined the retreat. By the time the unit reached the first houses of the village, he was well up in the front ranks again. And a few minutes later, he was breathlessly organizing the local defenses, employing the tactics that had shown their worth in the raids of the Laggand Bandits nine years before.

The starfish, however, was making no attempt to follow up the valley people's rout. It was still on the path at the point where the Guardian had seen it last, waving its arms about and hooting menacingly at the silent trees.

"THAT should do it, I guess," Grandma Wannattel said. "Before the first projection fizzles out, the next one in the chain will start up where they can see it from the village. It ought to be past midnight before anyone starts bothering about the globes again. Particularly since there aren't going to be any globes around tonight—that is, if the Halpa attack-schedule has been correctly estimated."

"I wish we were safely past midnight right now," the rhinocerine pony worriedly informed her. Its dark shape stood a little up the road from the trailer, outlined motionlessly like a ponderous statue against the red evening sky. Its head was up; it looked as if it were listening. Which it was, in its own way—listening for any signs of activity from the hollow.

"No sense getting anxious about it," Grandma remarked. She was perched on a rock at the side of the road, a short distance from the pony, with a small black bag slung over her shoulder. "We'll wait here

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another hour till it's good and dark and then go down to the hollow. The breakthrough might begin a couple of hours after that."

"It *would* have to be us again!" grumbled the pony. In spite of its size, its temperament was on the nervous side; and any companion of Grandma's was bound to run regularly into situations that were far from soothing. She belonged to a powerful human organization whose activities extended throughout most of those sections of the Galaxy where Terra's original colonies, and their branch-colonies, and branches of the branches, had grown down the centuries into new and independent civilizations. The role of the organization was that of watchdog for the safety of all, without regard for the often conflicting rulings and aims of individual governments; and sometimes that wider view made it necessary to take some very grim risks locally. Unfortunately, this was one of the times.

"I'd feel a lot better myself if Headquarters hadn't picked us for this particular operation," Grandma admitted. "Us and Noorhut. ... ."

Because, by what was a rather singular coincidence, considering how things stood there tonight, the valley was also Grandma's home. She had been born, quite some while before, a hundred and eighty miles farther inland, at the foot of the dam of the great river Wend, which had given its name to the land, and nowadays supplied it with almost all its required power.

Erisa Wannattel had done a great deal of traveling since she first became aware of the fact that her varied abilities and adventuresome nature needed a different sort of task to absorb them than could be found on Noorhut, which was progressing placidly up into the final stages of a rounded and balanced planetary civilization. But she still liked to consider the Valley of the Wend as her home and headquarters, to which she returned as often as her work would permit. Her exact understanding of the way people there thought about things and did things also made them easy for her to manipulate; and on occasion that could be very useful.

In most other places, the means she had employed to turn the Guardian and his troop back from the hollow probably would have started a panic or brought armed ships and radiation guns zooming up for the kill within minutes. But the valley people had considered it just another local emergency. The bronze alarm bell in the village had pronounced a state of siege, and cow horns passed the word up to the outlying farms. Within minutes, the farmers were pelting down the roads to the village with their families and 'guns; and, very soon afterward, everything quieted down again. Guard lines had been set up by then, with

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the women and children quartered in the central buildings, while the armed men had settled down to watching Grandma's illusion projections—directional video narrow beams—from the discreet distance marked by the village boundaries.

If nothing else happened, the people would just stay there till morning and then start a cautious investigation. After seeing mysterious blue lights dancing harmlessly over Grimp's farm for four summers, this section of Wend was pretty well conditioned to fiery apparitions. But even if they got too adventurous, they couldn't hurt themselves on the projections, which were designed to be nothing but very effective visual displays.

What it all came to was that Grandma had everybody in the neighborhood rounded up and immobilized where she wanted them.

IN EVERY other respect, the valley presented an exceptionally peaceful twilight scene to the eye. There was nothing to show that it was the only present point of contact between forces engaged in what was probably a war of intergalactic proportions—a war made wraithlike but doubly deadly by the circumstance that, in over a thousand years, neither side had found out much more about the other than the merciless and devastating finality of its forms of attack. There never had been any actual battles between Mankind and the Halpa, only alternate and very thorough massacres—all of them, from Mankind's point of view, on the wrong side of the fence.

The Halpa alone had the knowledge that enabled them to reach their human adversary. That was the trouble. But, apparently, they could launch their attacks only by a supreme effort, under conditions that existed for periods of less than a score of years, and about three hundred years apart as Mankind measured time.

It was hard to find any good in them, other than the virtue of persistence. Every three hundred years, they punctually utilized that brief period to execute one more thrust, carefully prepared and placed, and carried out with a dreadfully complete abruptness, against some new point of human civilization—and this time the attack was going to come through on Noorhut.

"Something's starting to move around in that hollow!" the pony announced suddenly. "It's not one of their globe-detectors."

"I know," murmured Grandma. "That's the first of the Halpa themselves. They're going to be right on schedule, it seems. But don't get nervous. They can't hurt anything until their transmitter comes through and revives them. We've got to be particularly careful now not to frighten them off. They seem to be even more sensitive to emotional tensions in their immediate

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surroundings than the globes."

The pony made no reply. It knew what was at stake and why eight big ships were circling Noorhut somewhere beyond space-detection tonight. It knew, too, that the ships would act only if it was discovered that Grandma had failed. But—

The pony shook its head uneasily. The people on Treebel had never become civilized to the point of considering the possibility of taking calculated risks on a planetary scale—not to mention the fact that the lives of the pony and of Grandma were included in the present calculation. In the eight years it had been accompanying her on her travels, it had developed a tremendous respect for Erisa Wannattel's judgment and prowess. But, just the same, frightening the Halpa off, if it still could be done, seemed like a very sound idea right now to the pony.

As a matter of fact, as Grandma well knew, it probably could have been done at this stage by tossing a small firecracker into the hollow. Until they had established their planetary foothold, the Halpa took extreme precautions. They could spot things in the class of radiation weapons a hundred miles away, and either that or any suggestion of local aggressiveness or of long-range observation would check the invasion attempt on Noorhut then and there.

But one of the principle reasons she was here tonight was to see that nothing *did* happen to stop it. For this assault would only be diverted against some other world then, and quite probably against one where the significance of the spying detector-globes wouldn't be understood before it was too late. The best information system in the Galaxy couldn't keep more than an insignificant fraction of its populations on the alert for dangers like that—

She bounced suddenly to her feet and, at the same instant, the pony swung away from the hollow toward which it had been staring. They both stood for a moment then, turning their heads about, like baffled hounds trying to fix a scent on the wind.

"It's Grimp!" Grandma exclaimed.

The rhinocerine pony snorted faintly. "Those are his thought images, all right," it agreed. "He seems to feel you need protection. Can you locate him?"

"Not yet," said Grandma anxiously. "Yes, I can. He's coming up through the woods on the other side of the hollow, off to the left. The little devil!" She was hustling back to the trailer. "Come on, I'll have to ride you there. I can't even dare use the go-buggy this late in the day."

The pony crouched beside the trailer while she quickly snapped on its saddle from the top of the back steps. Six metal rings had been welded into the horny plates

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of its back for this purpose, so it was a simple job. Grandma clambered aloft, hanging onto the saddle's hand-rails.

"Swing wide of the hollow," she warned. "Grimp came just as I suggested him mentally to. You needn't worry about making noise. The Halpa don't notice noise as such—it has to have emotional content for them to hear it—and the quicker Grimp spots us, the easier it will be to find him."

The pony already was rushing down into the meadow at an amazing rate of speed—it took a lot of muscle to drive a body like that through the gluey swamps of Treebel, and there were none here to impede it. It swung wide of the hollow and of what it contained, crossed a shallow bog farther down the meadow with a sound like a charging torpedo-boat, and reached the woods.

It had to slow down then to avoid brushing off Grandma.

"Grimp's down that slope somewhere," Grandma said. "He's heard us. . . ."

"They're making a lot of noise," Grimp's thought reached them suddenly and clearly. He seemed to be talking to someone. "But we're not scared of them, are we?"

"Bang-bang!" another voice-thought came excitedly.

"That was the lortel," Grandma said. "They're very good for giving children courage. Much better than Teddy Bears."

"That's the stuff," Grimp resumed approvingly. "We'll slingshot them all if they don't watch out. But we'd better find Grandma soon."

"Grimp!" shouted Grandma. The pony backed her up with a roaring call.

"Hello?" came the lortel's thought.

"Wasn't that the pony?" Grimp asked it, getting only another "hello" in reply. "All right, we'll go that way," he added, as though they had reached a joint decision.

"Here we come, Grimp!" Grandma shouted, and the pony descended the steep side of a ravine with the straightforward technique of a rock slide.

"That's Grandma!" thought Grimp. "Grandma!" he yelled. "Look out, there's monsters all around!"

"WHAT you missed!" yelled Grimp, dancing around the pony as Grandma Wannattel scrambled down from the saddle. "The monsters have the village surrounded, and the Guardian killed one and I slingshot another till he fizzled out, and I was coming to find you—"

"Your mother will be worried," said Grandma as they rushed into each other's arms.

"No," grinned Grimp. "All the kids are supposed to be sleeping in the school house, and she won't look there till morning, and the

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teacher said the monsters were all holynations—ho-lucy-nations. But he wouldn't go look when the Guardian said they'd show him one. He stayed right in bed! But the Guardian's all right—he killed one, and I slingshot another one and the lortel learned a new word. Say 'bang-bang,' lortel!"

"Hello!" squeaked the lortel.

"Aw, he's scared," said Grimp disappointedly. "He can say it, though. And I've come to take you to the village so the monsters don't chase after you. Hello, pony!"

"Bang-bang," said the lortel distinctly.

"See?" cried Grimp. "He wasn't scared, after all—he's a real brave lortel! If we see some monsters, don't you get scared, either, because I've got my slingshot," he said, waving it bloodthirstily, "and two back pockets all full of real big stones. I just hope my pants stay up. But that doesn't matter—the way to do it is to kill them all."

"It sounds like a pretty good idea, Grimp," Grandma agreed. "But you're awfully tired now."

"No, I'm not!" Grimp said, surprised. His right eye sagged shut and then his left. He opened them both with an effort and looked at Grandma. "I can stay awake all night, I bet," he argued drowsily. "I am—"

"In fact," said Grandma, "you're asleep."

"No, I'm n—" objected Grimp. Then he sagged toward the ground, and Grandma caught him firmly.

"In a way, I hate to do it," she panted, wrestling him aboard the pony, which had hunkered down and flattened itself as much as it could to make the job easier. "He'd probably enjoy it. But we can't take a chance. He's a husky little devil, too," she groaned, giving a final boost, "and those ammunition pockets don't make him any lighter." She clambered up again behind him and noticed that the lortel had transferred itself to her coat collar.

The pony stood up cautiously.

"Now what?" it asked.

"Might as well go straight to the hollow," said Grandma, breathing hard. "We'll probably have to wait around there a few hours, but if we're careful it won't do any harm."

"DID you find a good deep pond?" Grandma asked the pony a little later, as it came squishing up softly through the meadow behind her to rejoin her at the edge of the hollow.

"Yes," said the pony. "About a hundred yards back. That should be close enough. How much more waiting do you think we'll have to do?"

Grandma shrugged carefully. She was sitting in the grass with what, by daylight, would have been a good view of the hollow below. Grimp was asleep with his head on her knees. The lortel, after catching

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a few bugs in the grass and eating them, had settled down on her shoulder and dozed off, too.

"I don't know," she said. "It's still three hours till Big Moonrise, and it's bound to be some time before then. Now that you've found a waterhole, we'll just stay here together and wait. The one thing to remember is not to let yourself start getting excited about them."

The pony stood huge and chunky beside her, staring down, its forefeet on the edge of the hollow. Muddy water trickled from its knobby flanks. It had brought the warm mud-smells of a summer pond back with it to hang in a cloud about them.

There was vague, dark, continuous motion at the bottom of the hollow. A barely noticeable stirring in the single big pool of darkness that filled it.

"If I were alone," the pony said, "I'd get out of here! I know when I ought to be scared. But you've taken psychological control of my reactions, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Grandma. "It'll be easier for me, though, if you help along as much as you can. There's really no danger until their transmitter has come through."

"Unless," objected the pony, "they've worked out some brand-new tricks in the past few hundred years."

"There's that chance," Grandma admitted. "But they've never tried changing their tricks on us yet. If it were *us* doing the attacking, we'd vary our methods each time, as much as we could. But the Halpa don't seem to think the way we do about anything. They wouldn't still be so careful if they didn't realize they were very vulnerable at this point."

"I hope they're right about that!" the pony said anxiously.

Its head moved then, following the motion of something that sailed flutteringly out of the depths of the hollow, circled along its far rim, and descended again. The beings of Treebel had a much deeper range of night vision than Grandma Wannattel, but she was also aware of that shape.

"They're not much to look at," the pony remarked. "Like a big, dark rag of leather, almost."

"Their physical structure is believed to be quite simple," Grandma agreed slowly.

The pony was tensing up again, and she realized that it was best to go on talking to it, about almost anything at all. That always helped, even though the pony knew her much too well by now to be really fooled by such tricks.

"Many very efficient life-forms aren't physically complicated, you know," she went on, letting the sound of her voice ripple steadily into its mind. "Parasitical types, particularly. It's pretty certain, too, that the Halpa have the hive-mind class of intelligence, so what goes for the nerve systems of most of

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the ones they send through to us might be nothing much more than secondary reflex-transmitters. . . ."

Grimp stirred in his sleep at that point and grumbled. Grandma looked down at him. "You're sound asleep!" she told him severely, and he was again.

"You've got plans for that boy, haven't you?" said the pony, without shifting its gaze from the hollow.

"I've had my eye on him," Grandma admitted, "and I've already recommended him to the organization for observation. That's if we beat off the Halpa this time —and Grimp will be pretty important in deciding that. If we do, we'll let him develop with only a little help here and there. We'll see what he picks up naturally from the lortel, for instance, in the way of telepathic communication and sensory extensions. I think Grimp's the kind we can use."

"He's all right," the pony agreed absently. "A bit murderous, though, like most of you. . . ."

"He'll grow out of it!" Grandma said, a little annoyedly, for the subject of human aggressiveness was one she and the pony argued about frequently. "You can't hurry developments like that along too much. All of Noorhut should grow out of that stage, as a people, in another few hundred years. They're about at the turning-point right now—"

Their heads came up together then, as something very much like a big, dark rag of leather came fluttering up from the hollow and hung in the dark air above them. The representatives of the opposing powers that were facing each other on Noorhut that night took quiet stock of one another for a few moments.

THE Halpa was about six feet long and two feet wide, and considerably less than an inch thick. It held its position in the air with a steady, rippling motion, like a bat the size of a man, and then suddenly it extended itself with a snap, growing taut as a curved sail.

The pony snorted involuntarily. The apparently featureless shape in the air turned toward it and drifted a few inches closer. When nothing more happened, it turned again and fluttered quietly back down into the hollow.

"Could it tell I was scared?" the pony asked uneasily.

"You reacted just right," Grandma soothed. "Startled suspicion at first, and then just curiosity, and then another start when it made that jump. It's about what they'd expect from creatures that would be hanging around the hollow now. We're like cows to them. They can't tell what things are by their looks, as we do."

But her tone was thoughtful, and she was more shaken than she would have cared to let the pony notice. There had been something

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indescribably menacing and self-assured in the Halpa's attitude. Almost certainly, it had only been trying to draw a reaction of hostile intelligence from them, probing, perhaps, for the presence of weapons that might be dangerous to its kind.

But there was a chance—a tiny but appalling chance—that the things *had* developed some drastically new form of attack since their last breakthrough, and that they already were in control of the situation.

In which case, neither Grimp nor anyone else on Noorhut would be doing any more growing up after tomorrow.

Each of the eleven hundred and seventeen planets that had been lost to the Halpa so far still traced a fiery, forbidding orbit through space—torn back from the invaders only at the cost of depriving it, by humanity's own weapons, of the natural conditions that any known form of life could tolerate.

The possibility that that might also be Noorhut's future had loomed as an ugly enormity before her for the past four years. But of the nearly half a hundred worlds which the Halpa were found to be investigating, through their detector-globes, as possible invasion points for this assault period, Noorhut finally had been selected by Headquarters as the one where local conditions were most suited to meet them successfully. That meant in a manner that must include the destruction of their only real invasion weapon, the fabulous and mysterious Halpa Transmitter. Capable as they undoubtedly were, they had shown in the past that they were able or willing to employ only one of those instruments for each period of attack. Destroying the transmitter meant, therefore, that humanity would gain a few more centuries to figure out a way to get back at the Halpa before a new invasion attempt was made.

SO ON all planets but Noorhut, the detector-globes shrewdly had been encouraged to send back reports of a dangerously alert and well-armed population. On Noorhut, however, they had been soothed along . . . and just as her home planet had been chosen as the most favorable point of encounter, so was Erisa Wannattel herself selected as the agent most suited to represent humanity's forces under the conditions that existed there.

Grandma sighed gently and reminded herself again that Headquarters was as unlikely to miscalculate the overall probability of success as it was to select the wrong person to achieve it. There was only the tiniest, the most theoretical, of chances that something might go wrong, and that she would end her long career with

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the blundering murder of her own home world—

But there was that chance. It meant the lives of people whose ancestors she had known, an entire world she loved and hoped to retire to some day. Worse yet, it meant relying on a small, helpless, untrained child—who might, after all, not be the instrument she should have chosen.

"There seem to be more down there every minute!" the pony was saying.

Grandma drew a deep breath.

"Must be several thousand by now," she acknowledged. "It's getting near breakthrough time, all right—but that's only the advance forces." She added, "Do you notice anything like a glow of light down there, toward the center?"

The pony stared a moment. "Yes," it said. "But I would have thought that was way under the red for you. Can you see it?"

"No," said Grandma. "I get a kind of feeling, like heat. That's the transmitter beginning to come through. I think we've got them!"

The pony shifted its bulk slowly from side to side.

"Yes," it said resignedly, "or they've got us."

"Don't think about that," Grandma ordered sharply and clamped one more mental lock shut on the foggy, dark terrors that were curling and writhing under her conscious thoughts, trying to emerge and paralyze her actions.

She had opened her black bag and was unhurriedly fitting together something composed of a few pieces of wood and wire, and a rather heavy, stiff spring. . . .

"Just be ready," she added.

"I've been ready for an hour," said the pony, shuffling its feet.

"I mean Grimp," she explained, looking down at the sleeping boy intently. "A child is more perceptive than an adult, and his time sense is sharper because he lives at a much faster rate."

"Then his time sense should be faster, too," the pony said.

"It's like slow-motion film," Grandma told him. "The faster the camera goes, the more pictures it takes and the slower the action. A child is like that. Our time sense speeds up as we grow older and our life processes slow down. You might say we take fewer pictures than a child does."

"Makes sense," the pony agreed. "But what does it lead to?"

"Grimp," said Grandma, her face very close to the boy's, "is going to feel the critical moment of the breakthrough and let us know. He'll tell by the static tension in the air, the way a child becomes cranky when an electrical storm is getting ready to happen. We can't respond like that . . . even trained perceptives like us . . . and not, certainly, in awareness of fractions of a second."

The pony stared at Grimp with new respect. "He can?"

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GRANDMA took in a breath that sounded like the fluttering of agitated strips of paper. "I hope so," she said. "It can't be just any child, though all of them are more sensitive than any adult. It has to be a hyper-sensitive child."

"Then you're not sure he is."

"No," Grandma confessed reluctantly. "I can't be sure until it's too late."

They did no more talking after that. All the valley had become quiet about them. But slowly the hollow below was filling up with a black, stirring, slithering tide. Bits of it fluttered up now and then like strips of black smoke, hovered a few yards above the mass, and settled again.

Suddenly, down in the center of the hollow, there was something else.

The rhinocerine pony had seen it first, Grandma Wannattel realized. It had been staring in that direction for almost a minute before she grew able to distinguish something that might have been a group of graceful miniature spires. Semi-transparent in the darkness, four small domes showed at the corners, with a larger one in the center. The central one was about twenty feet high and very slender.

The whole structure began to solidify swiftly. . . .

The Halpa Transmitter's appearance of crystalline slightness was perhaps the most mind-chilling thing about it. For it brought instantly a jarring sense of what must be black distance beyond all distances, reaching back unimaginably to its place of origin. In that unknown somewhere, a prodigiously talented and determined race of beings had labored for human centuries to prepare and point some stupendous gun . . . and were able then to bridge the vast interval with nothing more substantial than this dark sliver of glass that had come to rest suddenly in the valley of the Wend.

But, of course, the Transmitter was all that was needed; its deadly poison lay in a sluggish, almost inert mass about it. Within minutes from now, it would waken to life, as similar transmitters had wakened on other nights on those lost and burning worlds. And in much less than minutes after that, the Halpa invaders would be hurled by their slender machine to every surface section of Noorhut—no longer inert, but quickened into a ravening, almost indestructible form of vampiric life, dividing and sub-dividing in its incredibly swift cycle of reproduction, fastening to feed anew, growing again—

Spreading, at that stage, much more swiftly than it could be exterminated by anything but the ultimate weapons!

The pony stirred suddenly, and she felt the wave of panic rolling up in it.

"It's the Transmitter, all right,"

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Grandma's thought reached it quickly. "We've had two descriptions of it before. But we can't be sure it's *here* until it begins to charge itself. Then it lights up—first at the edges, and then at the center. Once the central spire lights up, it will be energized too much to let them pull it back again. At least, they couldn't pull it back after that last time they were observed." She touched the sleeping boy anxiously. "Grimp will have to tell us when that exact instant is."

The pony had been told all that before. But as it listened, it was quieting down again.

"And you're to go on sleeping!" Grandma Wannattel's thought instructed Grimp next. "Your perception and time sense are to be alert, but you'll sleep on and remember nothing until I wake you."

LIGHT surged suddenly up in the Transmitter—first into the four outer spires, and a moment later into the big central one, in a sullen red glow. It lit the hollow with a smoky glare. The pony took two startled steps backward.

"Don't fail us, Grimp!" whispered Grandma's thought.

She reached again into her black bag and took out a small plastic ball. It reflected the light from the hollow in dull crimson gleamings. She let it slip down carefully inside the shaftlike frame of the gadget she had put together of wood and wire. It clicked into place there against one end of the compressed spring.

But she didn't take her eyes off the boy. He was stirring restlessly, his breathing growing quicker and more difficult. His little hands twitched from time to time, though he remained asleep.

"Watch the Halpa," she tensely told the pony. "I don't know if Grimp will sense the moment exactly. I'm not sure we can handle it then, but. . . ."

Down below, they lay now in a blanket fifteen feet thick over the wet ground, like big, black, water-sogged leaves swept up in circular piles about the edges of the hollow. The tops and sides of the piles were fluttering and shivering and beginning to slide down toward the Transmitter. She felt tension growing, but she couldn't trust her own age-dulled perception. If the child failed, all Noorhut would fall to the Halpa.

Grimp twisted in Grandma's arms abruptly, like a caught and fighting werret, and a strangled cry that was almost a sob came from him.

It was what Grandma had been waiting for. She raised the wooden catapult to her shoulder. The pony shook its blunt-horned head violently from side to side, made a loud bawling noise, surged forward and plunged down the steep slope of the hollow in a thundering rush.

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Grandma aimed carefully and let go.

There was no explosion. The blanket of dead-leaf creatures was lifting into the air ahead of the pony's ground-shaking approach in a weightless, silent swirl of darkness, which instantly blotted both the glowing Transmitter and the pony's shape from sight. The pony roared once as the blackness closed over it. A second later, there was a crash like the shattering of a hundred-foot mirror. At approximately the same moment, Grandma's plastic ball exploded somewhere in the center of the swirling storm of lethal life.

Cascading fountains of white fire filled the whole of the hollow. Within the fire, a dense mass of shapes fluttered and writhed frenziedly like burning rags. From down where the fire boiled fiercest rose continued sounds of brittle substances suffering enormous violence. The pony was trampling the Transmitter, making sure of its destruction.

"Better get out of it!" Grandma shouted anxiously. "What's left of that will all melt now, anyway!"

She didn't know whether it heard her or not, but a few seconds later, it came pounding up the side of the hollow again. Blazing from nose to rump, it tramped past Grandma, plunged through the meadow behind her, shedding white sheets of fire that exploded the marsh grass in its tracks, and hurled itself headlong into the pond it had selected previously. There was a great splash, accompanied by sharp hissing noises. Pond and pony vanished together under billowing clouds of steam.

"That was pretty hot!" its thought came to Grandma.

"Hot as anything that ever came out of a volcano!" she affirmed. "If you'd played around in it much longer, you'd have provided the village with roasts for a year."

"I'll just stay here for a while, till I've cooled off a bit," said the pony. "And I'd like to forget that last remark of yours, too. Civilized cannibals, that's what people are!"

GRANDMA found something strangling her then, and discovered it was the lortel's tail. She unwound it carefully. But the lortel promptly reanchored itself with all four hands in her hair. She decided to leave it there. It seemed badly upset.

Grimp, however, relaxed suddenly and slept on. It was going to take a little maneuvering to get him back into the village undetected before morning, but she would figure that out by and by. A steady flow of cool night air was being drawn past them into the hollow now, and rising out of it again in boiling, vertical columns of invisible heat. At the bottom of the de-luxe blaze she'd lit down there, things still seemed to be moving about—but very slowly. The Halpa

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were tough organisms, all right, though not nearly so tough, when you heated them up with a really good incendiary, as the natives of Treebel.

She would have to make a final check of the hollow around dawn, of course, when the ground should have cooled off enough to permit it—but her century's phase of the Halpa War did seem to be over. The defensive part of it, at any rate.

Wet munching sounds from the pond indicated the pony felt comfortable enough by now to take an interest in the parboiled vegetation it found floating about it.

"You picked the right child, after all," the pony's thought remarked to her.

"Yes, Grimp worked out fine," Grandma said a little proudly.

"I was pretty worried for a while."

"I won't say I was exactly easy myself. I thought Grimp was reacting slowly and I was getting ready to hurl the incendiary."

"But you didn't," the pony pointed out, chewing loudly.

"No. I suspected my perception might be too fast. It turned out to be almost two minutes off."

The rhinocerine pony stopped munching and she felt the shiver of fear that went through its mind. "As much as that? You'd have caught the Transmitter before it was matter. Nothing would have happened . . . except the Halpa would have swarmed through when the Transmitter materialized. We couldn't have stopped them."

"Grimp had the crisis down to the micro-second," she said happily. "Why fret about what might have happened?"

"You're right, of course," the pony agreed, but its enormous appetite seemed suddenly to have disappeared.

Grandma settled down carefully to sleep in the long marsh grass without disturbing Grimp's position too much. She appeared calm, but her sleep was more of a faint than untroubled slumber.

BY SUNRISE, Grandma Wannattel's patent-medicine trailer was nine miles from the village and rolling steadily southward up the valley road through the woods. As usual, she was departing under an official cloud.

Grimp and the policeman had showed up early to warn her. The Guardian was making use of the night's various unprecedented disturbances to press through a vote on a Public Menace charge against Grandma in the village. Since everybody still felt rather excited and upset, he had a good chance just now of getting a majority.

Grimp had accompanied her far enough to explain that this state of affairs wasn't going to be permanent. He had it all worked out:

Runny's new immunity to hayfever had brought him and the

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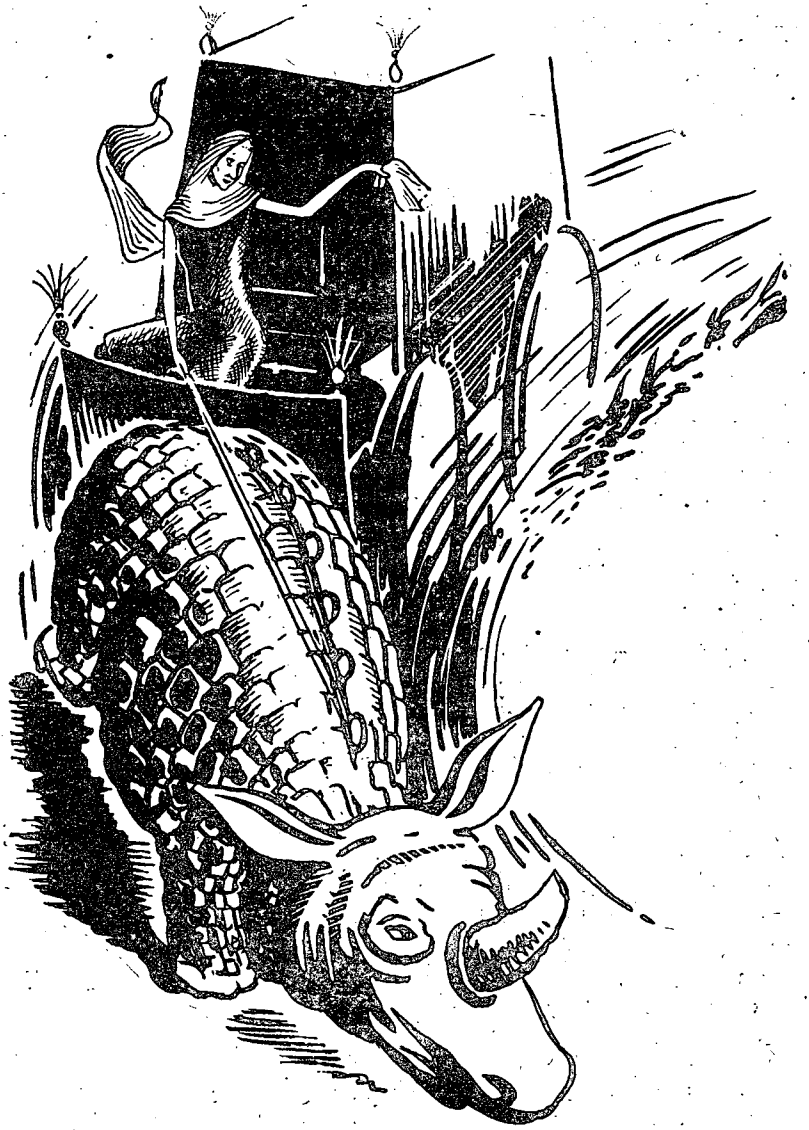

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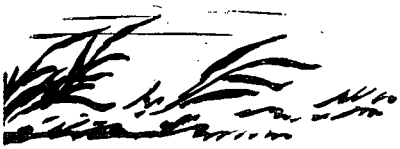

pretty Vellit to a fresh understanding overnight; they were going to get married five weeks from now. As a married man, Runny would then be eligible for the post of Village Guardian at the harvest elections. Between Grimp's cousins and Vellit's cousins, Runny's backers would just about control the vote. So when Grandma got around to visiting the valley again next summer, she needn't worry any more about police interference or official disapproval. . . .

Grandma had nodded approvingly. That was about the kind of neighborhood politics she'd begun to play herself at Grimp's age. She was pretty sure by now that Grimp was the one who eventually would become her successor as guardian of Noorhut; as well as of the star-system to which Noorhut belonged, and perhaps of a good many other star-systems besides. With careful schooling, he ought to be just about ready for the job by the time she was willing, finally, to retire.

An hour after he had started back to the farm, looking suddenly a little forlorn, the trailer swung off the valley road into a narrow forest path. Here the pony lengthened its stride, and less than five minutes later they entered a curving ravine, at the far end of which lay something that Grimp would have recognized instantly as a small spaceship from his one visit to the nearest port city.

A large round door opened soundlessly in its side as they approached. The pony came to a stop. Grandma got down from the driver's seat and unhitched it. The pony walked into the airlock, and the trailer picked its wheels off the ground and floated in behind it. Grandma Wannattel walked in last, and the lock closed quietly.

The ship lay still a moment longer. Then it was suddenly gone. Dead leaves went dancing for a while about the ravine, disturbed by the breeze of its departure.

In a place very far away—so far that neither Grimp nor his parents nor anyone in the village except the schoolteacher had ever heard of it—a set of instruments began signaling for attention. Somebody answered them.

Grandma's voice announced distinctly:

"This is Agent Wannattel's report on the successful conclusion of the Halpa operation on Noorhut—"

High above Noorhut's skies, eight great ships swung instantly out of their watchful orbits about the planet and flashed off again into the blackness of space that was their sea and their home.

—JAMES H. SCHMITZ

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JUDAS RAM

BY SAM MERWIN, Jr.

The house was furnished with all luxuries, including women. If it only had a lease that could be broken—

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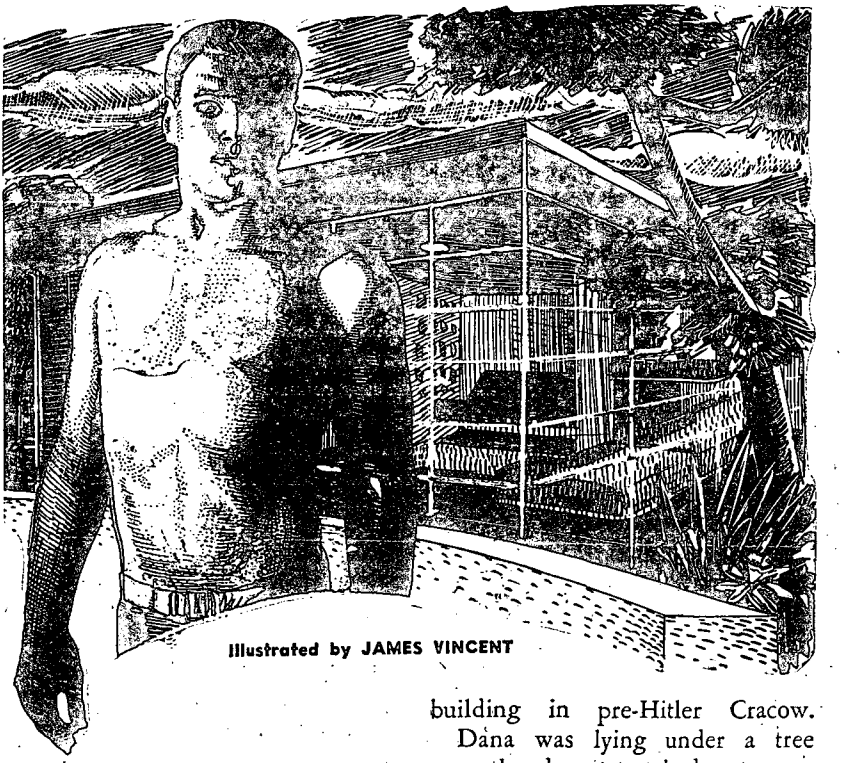

Illustrated by JAMES VINCENT

ROGER TENNANT, crossing the lawn, could see two of the three wings of the house, which radiated spoke-like from its heptagonal central portion. The wing on the left was white, with slim square pillars, reminiscent of scores of movie sets of the Deep South. That on the right was sundeck solar-house living-machine modern, something like a montage of shoeboxes. The wing hidden by the rest of the house was, he knew, spired, gabled and multicolored, like an ancient building in pre-Hitler Cracow.

Dana was lying under a tree near the door, stretched out on a sort of deck chair with her eyes closed. She wore a golden gown, long and close-fitting and slit up the leg like the gown of a Chinese woman. Above it her comely face was sullen beneath its sleek cocoon of auburn hair.

She opened her eyes at his approach and regarded him with nothing like favor. Involuntarily he glanced down at the tartan shorts that were his only garment to make sure that they were on properly. They were. He had thought them up in a moment of

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utter boredom and they were extremely comfortable. However, the near-Buchanan tartan did not crease or even wrinkle when he moved. Their captors had no idea of how a woven design should behave.

"Waiting for me?" Tennant asked the girl.

She said, "I'd rather be dead. Maybe I am. Maybe we're all dead and this is Hell."

He stood over her and looked down until she turned away her reddening face. He said, "So it's going to be you again, Dana. You'll be the first to come back for a second run."

"Don't flatter yourself," she replied angrily. She sat up, pushed back her hair, got to her feet a trifle awkwardly because of the tight-fitting tubular gown. "If I could do anything about it . . ."

"But you can't," he told her. "They're too clever."

"Is this crop rotation or did you send for me?" she asked cynically. "If you did, I wish you hadn't. You haven't asked about your son."

"I don't even want to think about him," said Tennant. "Let's get on with it." He could sense the restless stirring of the woman within Dana, just as he could feel the stirring toward her within himself—desire that both of them loathed because it was implanted within them by their captors.

They walked toward the house.

IT DIDN'T look like a prison—or a cage. Within the dome of the barrier, it looked more like a well-kept if bizarre little country estate. There was clipped lawn, a scattering of trees, even a clear little brook that chattered unending annoyance at the small stones which impeded its flow.

But the lawn was not of grass—it was of a bright green substance that might have been cellophane but wasn't, and it sprouted from a fabric that might have been canvas but was something else. The trees looked like trees, only their trunks were bark all the way through—except that it was not bark. The brook was practically water, but the small stones over which it flowed were of no earthly mineral.

They entered the house, which had no roof, continued to move beneath a sky that glowed with light which did not come from a sun or moon. It might have been a well-kept if bizarre little country estate, but it wasn't. It was a prison, a cage.

The other two women were sitting in the heptagonal central hall. Eudalia, who had borne twin girls recently, was lying back, newly thin and dark of skin and hair, smoking a scentless cigaret. A tall woman, thirtyish, she wore a sort of shimmering green strapless evening gown. Tennant wondered how she maintained it in place, for despite her recent double motherhood, she was almost flat of

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bosom. He asked her how she was feeling.

"Okay, I guess," she said. "The way they manage it, there's nothing to it." She had a flat, potentially raucous voice. Eudalia had been a female foreman in a garment-cutting shop before being captured and brought through.

"Good," he said. "Glad to hear it." He felt oddly embarrassed. He turned to Olga, broad, blonde and curiously vital, who sat perfectly still, regarding him over the pregnant swell of her dirndl-clad waist. Olga had been a waitress in a mining town hash-house near Scranton.

Tennant wanted to put an encouraging hand on her shoulder, to say something that might cheer her up, for she was by far the youngest of the three female captives, barely nineteen. But with the eyes of the other two, especially Dana, upon him, he could not.

"I guess I wasn't cut out to be a Turk," he said. "I don't feel at ease in a harem, even when it's supposedly my own."

"You're not doing so badly," Dana replied acidly.

"Lay off—he can't help it," said Eudalia unexpectedly. "He doesn't like it any better than we do."

"But he doesn't have to—have them," objected Olga. She had a trace of Polish accent that was not unpleasant. In fact, Tennant thought, only her laughter was unpleasant, a shrill, uncontrolled burst of staccato sound that jarred him to his heels. Olga had not laughed of late, however. She was too frightened.

"LET'S get the meal ordered," said Dana and they were all silent, thinking of what they wanted to eat but would not enjoy when it came. Tennant finished with his order, then got busy with his surprise.

It arrived before the meal, materializing against one of the seven walls of the roofless chamber. It was a large cabinet on slender straight legs that resembled dark polished wood. Tennant went to it, opened a hingeless door and pushed a knob on the inner surface. At once the air was hideous with the acerate harmony of a singing commercial. . . .

> . . . so go soak your head,
> be it gold, brown or red,
> in Any-tone Shampoo!

A disc jockey's buoyant tones cut in quickly as the final *ooooo* faded. "This is Grady Martin, your old night-owl, coming to you with your requests over Station WZZX, Manhattan. Here's a wire from Theresa McManus and the girls in the family entrance of Conaghan's Bar and Grill on West . . ."

Tennant watched the girls as a sweet-voiced crooner began to ply

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an unfamiliar love lyric to a melody whose similarity to a thousand predecessors doomed it to instant success.

Olga sat up straight, her pale blue eyes round with utter disbelief. She looked at the radio, at Tennant, at the other two women, then back at the machine. She murmured something in Polish that was inaudible, but her expression showed that it must have been wistful.

Eudalia grinned at Tennant and, rising, did a sort of tap dance to the music, then whirled back into her chair, green dress ashimmer, and sank into it just to listen.

Dana stood almost in the center of the room, carmine-tipped fingers clasped beneath the swell of her breasts. She might have been listening to Brahms or Debussy. Her eyes glowed with the salty brilliance of emotion and she was almost beautiful.

"Rog!" she cried softly when the music stopped. "A radio and WZZX! Is it—are they—real?"

"As real as you or I," he told her. "It took quite a bit of doing, getting them to put a set together. And I wasn't sure that radio would get through. TV doesn't seem to. Somehow it brings things closer. . . ."

Olga got up quite suddenly, went to the machine and, after frowning at it for a moment, tuned in another station from which a Polish-speaking announcer was followed by polka music. She leaned against the wall, resting one smooth forearm on the top of the machine. Her eyes closed and she swayed a little in time to the polka beat.

TENNANT caught Dana looking at him and there was near approval in her expression—approval that faded quickly as soon as she caught his gaze upon her. The food arrived then and they sat down at the round table to eat it.

Tennant's meat looked like steak, it felt like steak, but, lacking the aroma of steak, it was almost tasteless. This was so with all of their foods, with their cigarets, with everything in their prison—or their cage. Their captors were utterly without a human conception of smell, living, apparently, in a world without odor at all.

Dana said suddenly, "I named the boy Tom, after somebody I hate almost as much as I hate you."

Eudalia laid down her fork with a clatter and regarded Dana disapprovingly. "Why take it out on Rog?" she asked bluntly. "He didn't ask to come here any more than we did. He's got a wife back home. Maybe you want him to fall in love with you? Maybe you're jealous because he doesn't? Well, maybe he can't! And maybe it wouldn't work, the way things are arranged here."

"Thanks, Eudalia," said Ten-

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nant. "I think I can defend myself. But she's right, Dana. We're as helpless as—laboratory animals. They have the means to make us do whatever they want."

"Rog," said Dana, looking suddenly scared, "I'm sorry I snapped at you. I know it's not your fault. I'm—*changing.*"

He shook his head. "No, Dana, you're not changing. You're adapting. We all are. We seem to be in a universe of different properties as well as different dimensions. We're adjusting. I can do a thing or two myself that seem absolutely impossible."

"Are we really in the fourth dimension?" Dana asked. Of the three of them, she alone had more than a high-school education.

"We may be in the eleventh for all I know," he told her. "But I'll settle for the fourth—a fourth dimension in space, if that makes scientific sense, because we don't seem to have moved in time. I wasn't sure of that, though, till we got the radio."

"Why haven't they brought more of us through?" Eudalia asked, tamping out ashes in a tray that might have been silver.

"I'm not sure," he said thoughtfully. "I think it's hard for them. They have a hell of a time bringing anyone through alive, and lately they haven't brought anyone through—not alive."

"Why do they do it—the other way, I mean?" asked Dana.

Tennant shrugged. "I don't know. I've been thinking about it. I suppose it's because they're pretty human."

"*Human!*" Dana was outraged. "Do you call it human to—"

"Hold on," he said. "They pass through their gateway to Earth at considerable danger and, probably, expense of some kind. Some of them don't come back. They kill those of us who put up a fight. Those who don't—or can't—they bring back with them. Live or dead, we're just laboratory specimens."

"Maybe," Eudalia conceded doubtfully. Then her eyes blazed. "But the things they do—stuffing people, mounting their heads, keeping them on display in their—their whatever they live in. You call that human, Rog?"

"Were you ever in a big-game hunter's trophy room?" Tennant asked quietly. "Or in a Museum of Natural History? A zoo? A naturalist's lab? Or even, maybe, photographed as a baby on a bearskin rug?"

"I was," said Olga. "But that's not the same thing."

"Of course not," he agreed. "In the one instance, *we're* the hunters, the breeders, the trophy collectors. In the other"—he shrugged—"we're the trophies."

THERE was a long silence. They finished eating and then Dana stood up and said, "I'm going out

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on the lawn for a while." She unzipped her golden gown, stepped out of it to reveal a pair of tartan shorts that matched his, and a narrow halter.

"You thought those up while we ate," he said. It annoyed him to be copied, though he did not know why. She laughed at him silently, tossed her auburn hair back from her face and went out of the roofless house, holding the gold dress casually over her bare arm.

Eudalia took him to the nursery. He was irritated now in another, angrier way. The infants, protected by cellophane-like coverlets, were asleep.

"They never cry," the thin woman told him. "But they grow—God, how they grow!"

"Good," said Tennant, fighting down his anger. He kissed her, held her close, although neither of them felt desire at the moment. Their captors had seen to that; it wasn't Eudalia's turn. Tennant said, "I wish I could do something about this. I hate seeing Dana so bitter and Olga so scared. It isn't their fault."

"And it's not yours," insisted Eudalia. "Don't let them make you think it is."

"I'll try not to," he said and stopped, realizing the family party was over. He had felt the inner tug of command, said good-by to the women and returned to his smaller compound within its own barrier dome.

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Then came the invisible aura of strain in the air, the shimmering illusion of heat that was not heat, that was prelude to his teleportation . . . if that were the word. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant; it *was,* that was all.

He called it the training hall, not because it looked like a training hall but because that was its function. It didn't actually look like anything save some half-nourished dream a surrealist might have discarded as too nightmarish for belief.

As in all of this strange universe, excepting the dome-cages in which the captives were held, the training hall followed no rules of three-dimensional space. One wall looked normal for perhaps a third of its length, then it simply wasn't for a bit. It came back farther on at an impossible angle. Yet, walking along it, touching it, it felt *perfectly smooth and continuously* straight.

The opposite wall resembled a diagonal cross-section of an asymmetrical dumbbell—that was the closest Tennant could come to it in words. And it, too, felt straight. The floor looked like crystal smashed by some cosmic impact, yet it had reason. He *knew* this even though no reason was apparent to his three-dimensional vision. The ceiling, where he could see it, was beyond description.

The captor Tennant called

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Opal came in through a far corner of the ceiling. He—if it was a he—was not large, although this, Tennant knew, meant nothing; Opal might extend thousands of yards in some unseen direction. He had no regular shape and much of him was iridescent and shot with constantly changing colors. Hence the name Opal.

Communication was telepathic. Tennant could have yodeled or yelled or sung *Mississippi Mud* and Opal would have shown no reaction. Yet Tennant suspected that the captors could hear somewhere along the auditory scale, just as perhaps they could smell, although not in any human sense.

You will approach without use of your appendages.

The command was as clear as if it had been spoken aloud. Tennant took a deep breath. He thought of the space beside Opal. It took about three seconds and he was there, having spanned a distance of some ninety feet. He was getting good at it.

Dog does trick, he thought.

HE WENT through the entire routine at Opal's bidding. When at last he was allowed to relax, he wondered, not for the first time, if he weren't mastering some of the alleged Guru arts. At once he felt probing investigation. Opal, like the rest of the captors, was as curious as a cat—or a human being.

Tennant sat against a wall, drenched with sweat. There would be endless repetition before his workout was done. On Earth, dogs were said to be intellectually two-dimensional creatures. He wondered if they felt this helpless futility when their masters taught them to heel, to point, to retrieve.

Some days later, the training routine was broken. He felt a sudden stir of near-sick excitement as he received the thought:

Now you are ready. We are going through at last.

Opal was nervous, so much so that he revealed more than he intended. Or perhaps that was his intent; Tennant could never be sure. They were going through to Tennant's own dimension. He wondered briefly just what his role was to be.

He had little time to speculate before Opal seemed to envelop him. There was the blurring wrench of forced teleportation and they were in another room, a room which ended in a huge irregular passage that might have been the interior of a giant concertina—or an old-fashioned kodak.

He stood before a kidney-shaped object over whose jagged surface colors played constantly. From Opal's thoughts it appeared to be some sort of ultradimensional television set, but to Tennant it was as incomprehensible as an oil painting to an animal.

Opal was annoyed that Tennant

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could make nothing of it. Then came the thought:

What cover must your body have not to be conspicuous?

Tennant wondered, cynically, what would happen if he were to demand a costume of mediaeval motley, complete with Pied Piper's flute. He received quick reproof that made his head ring as from a blow.

He asked Opal where and when they were going, was informed that he would soon emerge on Earth where he had left it. That told him everything but the date and season. Opal, like the rest of the captors, seemed to have no understanding of time in a human sense.

Waiting, Tennant tried not to think of his wife, of the fact that he hadn't seen her in—was it more than a year and a half on Earth? He could have controlled his heartbeat with one of his new powers, but that might have made Opal suspicious. He should be somewhat excited. He allowed himself to be, though he obscured the reasons. He was going to see his wife again . . . and maybe he could trick his way into not returning.

* * *

THE maid who opened the door for him was new, although her eyes were old. But she recognized him and stood aside to let him enter. There must, he thought, still be pictures of him around. He wondered how Agatha could afford a servant.

"Is Mrs. Tennant in?" he asked.

She shook her head and fright made twin stoplights of the rouge on her cheeks as she shut the door behind him. He went into the living room, directly to the long silver cigaret box on the coffee table. It was proof of homecoming to fill his lungs with smoke he could *smell*. He took another drag, saw the maid still in the doorway, staring.

"There's no need for fright," he told her. "I believe I still own this house." Then, "When do you expect Mrs. Tennant?"

"She just called. She's on her way home from the club."

Still looking frightened, she departed for the rear of the house. Tennant stared after her puzzledly until the kitchen door swung shut behind her. The club? What club?

He shrugged, returned to the feeling of comfort that came from being back here, about to see Agatha again, hold her close in no more than a few minutes. And stay, his mind began to add eagerly, but he pushed the thought down where Opal could not detect it.

He took another deep, lung-filling drag on his cigaret, looked around the room that was so important a part of his life. The three women back there would be in a

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ghastly spot. He felt like a heel for wanting to leave them there, then knew that he would try somehow to get them out. Not, of course, anything that would endanger his remaining with Agatha; the only way his captors would get him back would be as a taxidermist's specimen.

He realized, shocked and scared, that his thoughts of escape had slipped past his mental censor, and he waited apprehensively for Opal to strike. Nothing happened and he warily relaxed. Opal wasn't tapping his thoughts. Because he felt sure of his captive . . . or because he couldn't on Earth?

It was like being let out of a cage. Tennant grinned at the bookcase; the ebony-and-ivory elephants that Agatha had never liked were gone, but he'd get them back or another pair. The credenza had been replaced by a huge and ugly television console. That, he resolved, would go down in the cellar rumpus room, where its bleached modernity wouldn't clash with the casual antiquity of the living room.

Agatha would complain, naturally, but his being back would make up for any amount of furniture shifting. He imagined her standing close to him, her lovely face lifted to be kissed, and his heart lurched like an adolescent's. This hunger was real, not implanted. Everything would be real . . . his love for her, the food he ate, the things he touched, his house, his life. . . .

Your wife and a man are approaching the house.

The thought message from Opal crumbled his illusion of freedom. He sank down in a chair, trying to refuse to listen to the rest of the command:

You are to bring the man through the gateway with you. We want another live male.

TENNANT shook his head, stiff and defiant in his chair. The punishment, when it came, was more humiliating than a slap across a dog's snout. Opal had been too interested in the next lab specimen to bother about his thoughts—that was why he had been free to think of escape.

Tennant closed his eyes, willed himself to the front window. Now that he had mastered teleportation, it was incredible how much easier it was in his own world. He had covered the two miles from the gateway to the house in a mere seven jumps, the distance to the window in an instant. But there was no pleasure in it, only a confirmation of his captor's power over him.

He was not free of them. He understood all too well what they wanted him to do; he was to play the Judas goat . . . or rather the Judas ram, leading another victim to the fourth-dimensional pen.

Grim, he watched the swoop of

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headlights in the driveway and returned to the coffee table, lit a fresh cigarette.

The front door was flung open and his diaphragm tightened at the remembered sound of Agatha's throaty laugh . . . and tightened further when it was followed by a deeper rumbling laugh. Sudden fear made the cigarette shake in his fingers.

" . . . Don't be such a stuffed-shirt, darling." Agatha's mocking sweetness rang alarm-gongs in Tennant's memory. "Charley wasn't making a grab for *me*. He'd had one too many and only wanted a little fun. Really, darling, you seem to think that a girl . . ."

Her voice faded out as she saw Tennant standing there. She was wearing a white strapless gown, had a blue-red-and-gold Mandarin jacket slung hussar-fashion over her left shoulder. She looked even sleeker, better groomed, more assured than his memory of her.

"I'm no stuffed-shirt and you know it." Cass' tone was peevish. "But your idea of fun, Agatha, is pretty damn . . ."

It was his turn to freeze. Unbelieving, Tennant studied his successor. Cass Gordon—the *man*, the ex-halfback whose bulk was beginning to get out of hand, but whose inherent aggressive grace had not yet deserted him. The *man*, that was all—unless one threw in the little black mustache and the smooth salesman's manner.

"You know, Cass," Tennant said quietly, "I never for a moment dreamed it would be you."

"*Roger*!" Agatha found her voice. "You're *alive!*"

"Roger," repeated Tennant viciously. He felt sick with disgust. Maybe he should have expected a triangle, but somehow he hadn't. And here it was, with all of them going through their paces like a trio of tent-show actors. He said, "For God's sake, sit down."

Agatha did so hesitantly. Her huge dark eyes, invariably clear and limpid no matter how much she had drunk, flickered toward him furtively. She said defensively, "I had detectives looking for you for six months. Where have you been, Rog? Smashing up the car like that and—disappearing! I've been out of my mind."

"Sorry," said Tennant. "I've had my troubles, too." Agatha was scared stiff—of him. Probably with reason. He looked again at Cass Gordon and found that he suddenly didn't care. She couldn't say it was loneliness. Women have waited l o n g e r than eighteen months. He would have if his captors had let him.

"Where in hell *have* you been, Rog?" Gordon's tone was almost parental. "I don't suppose it's news to you, but there was a lot of suspicion directed your way while that crazy killer was operating around here. Agatha and I managed to clear you."

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"Decent of you," said Tennant. He got up, crossed to the cabinet that served as a bar. It was fully equipped—with more expensive liquor, he noticed, than he had ever been able to afford. He poured a drink of brandy, waited for the others to fill their glasses.

AGATHA looked at him over the rim of hers. "Tell us, Rog. We have a right to know. I do, anyway."

"One question first," he said. "What about those killings? Have there been any lately?"

"Not for over a year," Cass told him. "They never did get the devil who skinned those bodies and removed the heads."

So, Tennant thought, they hadn't used the gateway. Not since they had brought the four of them through, not since they had begun to train him for his Judas ram duties.

Agatha was asking him if he had been abroad.

"In a way," he replied unemotionally. "Sorry if I've worried you, Agatha, but my life has been rather —indefinite, since I—left."

He was standing no more than four inches from this woman he had desired desperately for six years, and he no longer wanted her. He was acutely conscious of her perfume. It wrapped them both like an exotic blanket, and it repelled him. He studied the firm clear flesh of her cheek and chin, the arch of nostril, the carmine fullness of lower lip, the swell of bosom above low-cut gown. And he no longer wanted any of it or of her. Cass Gordon—

It didn't have to be anybody at all. For it to be Cass Gordon was revolting.

"Rog," she said and her voice trembled, "what are we going to do? What do you *want* to do?"

Take her back? He smiled ironically; she wouldn't know what that meant. It would serve her right, but maybe there was another way.

"I don't know about you," he said, "but I suspect we're in the same boat. I also have other interests."

"You louse!" said Cass Gordon, arching rib cage and nostrils. "If you try to make trouble for Agatha, I can promise . . ."

"*What* can you promise?" demanded Tennant. When Gordon's onset subsided in mumbles, he added, "Actually, I don't think I'm capable of making more than a fraction of the trouble for either of you that you both are qualified to make for yourselves."

He lit a cigarette, inhaled. "Relax. I'm not planning revenge. After this evening, I plan to vanish for good. Of course, Agatha, that offers you a minor nuisance. You will have to wait six years to marry Cass—seven years if the maid who let me in tonight talks. That's the law, isn't it, Cass? You probably had it all figured out."

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"You bastard," said Cass. "You dirty bastard! You know what a wait like that could do to us."

"Tristan and Isolde," said Tennant, grinning almost happily. "Well, I've had my little say. Now I'm off again. Cass, would you give me a lift? I have a conveyance of sorts a couple of miles down the road."

HE NEEDED no telepathic powers to read the thoughts around him then. He heard Agatha's quick intake of breath, saw the split-second look she exchanged with Cass. He turned away, knowing that she was imploring her lover to do something, *anything*, as long as it was safe.

Deliberately, Tennant poured himself a second drink. This might be easier and pleasanter than he had expected. They deserved some of the suffering he had had and there was a chance that they might get it.

Tennant knew now why he was the only male human the captors had been able to take alive. Apparently, thanks to the rain-slick road, he had run the sedan into a tree at the foot of the hill beyond the river. He had been sitting there, unconscious, ripe fruit on their doorstep. They had simply picked him up.

Otherwise, apparently, men were next to impossible for them to capture. All they could do was kill them and bring back their heads and hides as trophies. With women it was different—perhaps the captors' weapons, whatever they were, worked more efficiently on females. A difference in body chemistry or psychology, perhaps.

More than once, during his long training with Opal, Tennant had sent questing thoughts toward his captor, asking why they didn't simply set up the gateway in some town or city and take as many humans as they wanted.

Surprisingly there had been a definite fear reaction. As nearly as he could understand, it had been like asking an African pygmy, armed with a blowgun, to set up shop in the midst of a herd of wild elephants. It simply wasn't feasible—and furthermore he derived an impression of the tenuosity as well as the immovability of the gateway itself.

They could be hurt, even killed by humans in a three-dimensional world. How? Tennant did not know. Perhaps as a man can cut finger or even throat on the edge of a near-two-dimensional piece of paper. It took valor for them to hunt men in the world of men. In that fact lay a key to their character—if such utterly alien creatures could be said to have character.

CASS GORDON was smiling at him, saying something about one for the road. Tennant accepted only because it was luxury to drink liquor that smelled and tasted as

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liquor should. He raised his glass to Agatha, said, "I may turn up again, but it's unlikely, so have yourself a time, honey."

"Oh, Rog!" said Agatha and her eyes were fraudulently wet. Tennant felt pure contempt. She knew that Cass intended to try to kill him—and she couldn't play it straight. She had to ham it up with false emotion, even though she had silently pleaded with her lover to do something, anything. He put down his empty glass. The thought that he had spent eighteen months yearning for this she-Smithfield like a half-damp puppy made him almost physically ill.

"You'll make out," he told her with savage sincerity. In her way, in accord with her desires, Agatha would. At bottom she was, he realized, as primitive, as realistic, as the three who waited beyond the gateway. An ex-waitress, an ex-forewoman, an ex-model of mediocre success—and Agatha. He tried to visualize his wife as a member of his involuntary harem and realized that she would adapt as readily as the other women. But he didn't want her.

He turned away and said, "Ready, Cass?"

"Right with you," the ex-halfback replied, hurrying toward the hall. Tennant considered, took another drink for his own road. The signals had been given, the game was being readied. He had no wish to upset the planning. He had some plans also, and theirs gave his enough moral justification to satisfy his usually troublesome conscience.

Agatha put her arms around his neck. She was warm and soft and moist of lip and playing her part with obvious enjoyment of its bathos. She murmured, "I'm so sorry, Rog, darling—"

"Cut!" he said almost in a snarl and wrenched free. He brought out a handkerchief—he had remembered to have one created, praise Allah—and rubbed lipstick from his face. He tossed the handkerchief to Agatha.

"You might have this analyzed," he told her lightly. "It could be interesting. The handkerchief, not the lipstick."

"I'm glad you're going!" she blazed, although her voice was low. "I'm *glad* you're going. I hope you *never* come back."

"That," he told her, "makes exactly two of us. Have fun."

He went out into the hall, where Cass was waiting, wearing what was intended to be a smile. They went out to the car together—it was a big convertible—and Cass got behind the wheel. He said, "Where to, old man?"

"The Upham Road," said Tennant, feeling nothing at all.

CASS got the car under way and Tennant sensed them coming through. They warned him that his chauffeur was carry-

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ing a weapon concealed in an inside pocket.

As if I didn't know! Tennant snapped back at them.

Cass tried to drive him past the spot beyond the bridge where the gateway lay hidden in its armor of invisibility. He evidently planned to go miles from the house before doing whatever he had decided to do.

Tennant thought he knew. It would involve riding the back roads like this one for fifteen or twenty miles, perhaps farther. He suspected that the quarry pond in South Upham was his intended destination. There would be plenty of loose rock handy with which to weigh down his body before dumping it into the water.

If it were recovered, Cass and Agatha could alibi one another. In view of his earlier disappearance, this would be simple. Of course there was the maid, but Cass had enough money and smooth talk to manage that angle. They could undoubtedly get away with killing him.

"Stop," said Tennant, just across the bridge.

"What for?" Cass countered and Tennant knew it was time to act. He wrenched the key from the ignition switch, tossed it out of the car. Cass braked, demanded, "What in hell did you do *that* for?"

"I get out here," Tennant said. "You didn't stop."

"Okay, if that's the way you want it." Cass' heavy right hand, the little black hairs on its back clearly visible in the dashboard light, moved toward his inside pocket.

Tennant teleported to the side of the road, became a half-visible shade against the darkness of the trees. He felt Opal's excitement surge through his brain, knew that from then on his timing would have to be split-second perfect.

It seemed to him as if all the inchoate thoughts, all the vague theories, all the half-formed plans of more than a year had crystalized. For the first time since his capture, he not only knew what he wanted to do—but saw the faint glimmer of a chance of doing it successfully.

He was going to try to lead Cass to the gateway, maneuver him inside—and then escape. They wouldn't get Tennant; the power of teleportation they themselves had given him would keep him from being captured again. It would work. He was sure of it. They'd have their male specimen and he'd be free . . . not to go back to Agatha, because he wouldn't, but to help the three women to get back, too.

CASS was plunging after him now, pistol in hand, shouting. Tennant could have him killed now, have him flayed and decapitated as other male victims

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had been. Opal might even give him the hide as a reward after it was treated. Some Oriental potentate, Tennant reflected, might relish having his wife's lover as a rug on his living room floor. Tennant preferred the less operatic revenge of leaving Cass and Agatha alive to suffer.

He teleported farther into the trees, closer to the gateway, plotting carefully his next moves. Cass was crashing along, cursing in frustration.

"Stand still, damn you! You shift around like a ghost!"

Tennant realized with sudden terror that Cass might give up, unable to solve his prey's abrupt appearances and disappearances. He needed encouragement to keep him going.

Jeeringly, Tennant paused, simultaneously thumbed his nose and stuck out his tongue at Cass. The scornful childishness of the gesture enraged Cass more than the worst verbal insult could have. He yelled his anger and fired at Tennant. There was no way to miss, but Tennant was five yards farther on before the explosion ended.

"Calm down," he advised quietly. "Getting mad always spoils your aim."

That, naturally, made Cass even angrier. He fired viciously twice more before Tennant reached the gateway, both times without a chance of hitting his elusive target.

Opal, Tennant discovered, was almost as frantic as Cass. He was deep inside the passage, jittering visibly in his excitement, in his anticipation of the most important bag his species had yet made on

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Earth. And there was something else in his thoughts. . . .

Anxiety. Fear. The gateway was vulnerable to third-dimensional weapons. Where the concertina-like passage came into contact with Earth, there was a belt, perhaps a foot in width, which was spanned by some sort of force-webbing. Opal was afraid that a bullet might strike the webbing and destroy the gateway.

Cass was getting closer. It would be so easy . . . keep teleporting, bewilder him, let him make a grab . . . and then skip a hundred yards away just as the gateway shut. He would be outside, Cass inside.

And the three women? Leave them with Cass? Leave the gateway open for more live or mounted specimens?

Tennant concentrated on the zone of strain at the point of dimensional contact, was there directly in front of it. Cass, cursing, lunged clear of the underbrush outside, saw Tennant there. Tennant was crouching low, not moving, staring mockingly at him. He lifted the automatic and fired.

TENNANT teleported by inches instead of yards, and so blood oozed from a graze on his left ear when he rejoined a shaken Opal in the world that knew no night. For a long time—how long, of course, he could not know—they stood and watched the gateway burn to globular ash in a dark brown fire that radiated searing cold.

Opal was in trouble. An aura of anger, of grief, of accusation, surrounded him. Others of them came and for a while Tennant

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was forgotten. Then, abruptly, he was back in his own compound, walking toward the house.

In place of his country Napoleonic roll-bed, which he had visualized for manufacture with special care, Dana had substituted an immense modern sleeping device that looked like a low hassock with a ten-foot diameter. She was on her knees, her back toward the door, fiddling with a radio.

She heard him enter, said without turning, "It won't work. Just a little while ago it stopped."

"I think we're cut off now, perhaps for good," he told her. He sat down on the edge of the absurd bed and began to take off the clothes they had given him for the hunt. He was too tired to protest against the massacre of his bedroom decor. He was not even sure he wanted to protest. For all its anachronism, the big round bed was comfortable.

She watched him, her hands on her thighs, and there was worry written on her broad forehead. "You know something, Rog."

"I don't *know* anything," he replied. "I only think and have theories." Unexpectedly he found himself telling her all about it, about himself, where he had been, what he had done.

She listened quietly, saying nothing, letting him go on. His head was in her lap and he talked up to her while she ran gentle fingers through his hair. When he had finished, she smiled down at him thoughtfully, affectionately, then said, "You know, you're a funny kind of man, Roger."

"Funny?"

She cuffed him gently. "You know what I mean. So now we're really cut off in this place—you and me and little Tom and Olga and Eudalia and the twins. What are we going to do, Roger?"

He shrugged. He was very tired. "Whatever they'll let us do," he said through a yawn. "Maybe we can make this a two-way study. They are almost human, you know. Almost." He pulled her down and kissed her and felt unexpected contentment decant through his veins. He knew now that things had worked out the right way, the only way. He added aloud, "I think we'll find ways to keep ourselves amused."

"You really enjoy playing the heel, don't you, Rog?" Her lips moved against his as she spoke. "You had a chance to get out of here. You could have changed places with Cass. Maybe you could have destroyed the gateway and stayed on the other side and still saved other victims. But no, you had to come back to—us. I think I'm going to be in love with you for that."

He sat up on one elbow and looked down at her half angrily. "Are you trying to make a goddam hero out of me?" he asked.

—SAM MERWIN, Jr.

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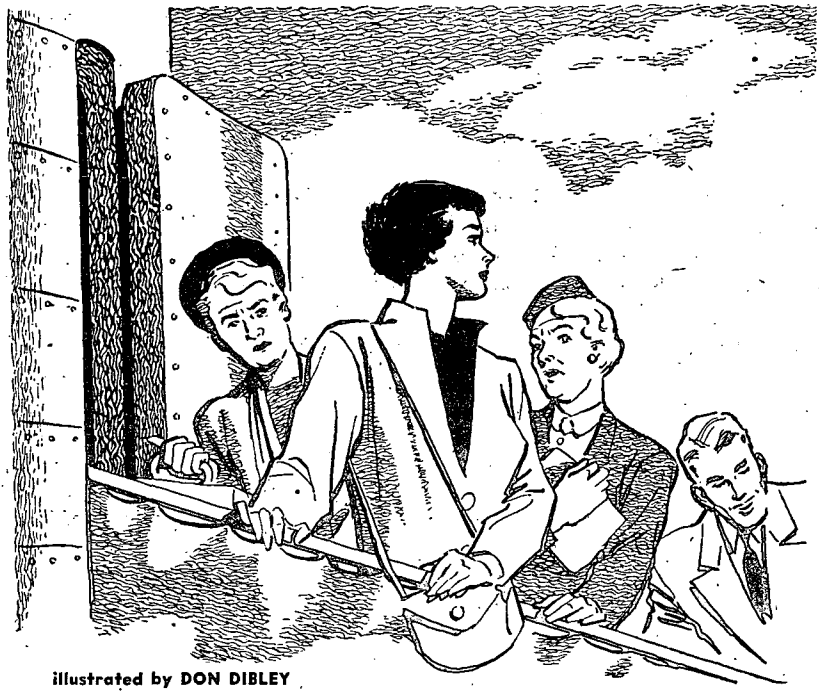

illustrated by DON DIBLEY

JAYWALKER

BY ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Women may be against progress because it means new pseudo-widowhoods. Space-widowhood, for instance . . .

AT LAST she was on the gangplank, entering the mouth of the spaceship—and nothing could ever stop her now. Not unless she broke down completely in front of all these hurrying, Moon-bound passengers, in plain sight of the scattered crowd which clustered on the other side of the space-field barriers. Even that possibility was denied her when two gently insistent middle-aged ladies indicated she was blocking the way. . . .

Somehow, dizzily, she was at her seat, led there by a smiling, brown-clad stewardess; and her azure-tipped fingers were clutching at the

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pearl-gray plasta-leather of the chair arm. Her eyes, the azure of her nails, the azure (so she had been told) of Earth seen from interplanetary space, grew hot. She closed them, and for a moment gave herself up to an almost physical yearning for the Toluca Lake house—the comfort, the safety, the —the *sanity* of it.

STUBBORNLY she forced herself back to reality. At any moment Jack, dark-eyed and scrappy, might come swinging down the long, shining aisle. Jack —Captain Jack McHenry, if you please—must not know, yet, what she was doing to patch up their marriage.

She turned her face away from the aisle, covered her cheek with her hand to hide it. Her gaze went out through the ray-proof glass port to the field, to the laboring beetle of a red tractor bearing the gangway on its busy back, to the low, blast-proof administration building. When her gaze came to the tall sign over the entrance, she hurried it past; it was too late to think about that now, the square, shouting type that read:

CAUTION
HAVE YOU PASSED YOUR PHYSICAL EXAMINATION?
Avoiding It May Cost Your Life!

"May I see your validation, please?"

Marcia McHenry stiffened. Had she read the sign aloud? She turned startled eyes up to the smiling stewardess, who was holding out a well-groomed hand. Marcia responded weakly to the smile, overcame a sudden urge to blurt out that she had no validation—not her own, anyway. But her stiff fingers were already holding out the pink card with Nellie Foster's name on it.

"You're feeling well, Mrs. Foster?"

Feeling well? Yes, of course. Except for the—usual sickness. But that's so very normal. . . . Her numb lips moved. "I'm fine," she said.

Miss Eagen (which, her neat lapel button attested, was her name) made a penciled frown as lovely as her machined smile. "Some day," she told Marcia, "we won't have to ask the passengers if they're well. It's so easy to come aboard on someone else's validation, and people don't seem to realize how dangerous that is."

As Miss Eagen moved to the next seat, Marcia shrank into a small huddle, fumbling with the card until it was crammed shapeless into her purse. Then from the depths of her guilt came rebellion. It was going to be all right. She was doing the biggest thing she'd ever done, and Jack would rise to the occasion, and it would be all right.

It *had* to be all right . . .

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After this—if this didn't work—there just would be nothing else she could do. She wasn't a scheming woman. No one would ever know how difficult it had been for her to think up the whole plan, to find Nellie Foster (someone Jack had never met) and to persuade Nellie to register for the trip and take the physical for her. She'd had to lie to Nellie, to make Nellie think she was brave and adventurous, and that she was just doing it to surprise Jack.

Oh, he'd be surprised, all right.

The flash walls on the field were being raised to keep the blow-by from the ship's jets from searing the administration building and the area beyond. Marcia realized with crushing suddenness that the ship was about to blast off in seconds. She half-rose, then sank back, biting her lip. Silly . . . Jack had said that—her fear of space was silly. He'd said it during the quarrel, and he'd roared at her, "And that's why you want me to come back—ground myself, be an Earth-lubber—so I can spare you the anguish of sitting home wondering if I'll come back alive!"

AND then he'd been sorry he'd shouted, and he sat by her, taking her chin in his hand. "Marcia, Marcia," he'd said gently, "you're so *silly!* It's been nineteen whole years since your father died in the explosion of a Moon-rocket. Rocket motors just don't explode any more, honey! Ships travel to the Moon and back on iron-clad, mathematical orbits that are figured before the ship puffs a jet—"

"The *Elsinore?*" She'd said it viciously, to taunt him, and something in her had been pleased at the dull flush that rose to his face. Everyone knew about the *Elsinore,* the 500-foot Moon-ferry that almost missed the Moon.

"That," he said bitterly, "was human damnfoolishness botching up the equations. Too many lobbyists have holdings on the Moon and don't want to risk not being able to go there in a hurry. So they haven't passed legislation to keep physically unfit people off spaceships. One of the passengers got aboard the *Elsinore* on somebody else's validation—which meant that nobody knew he was taking endocrine treatments to put hair on his brainless head and restore his— Oh, the *Jaywalker!*" Jack spat in disgust. "Anyway, he was the kind of idiot who never realizes that certain glandular conditions are fatal in free fall."

Even now she distinctly recalled the beginnings of the interplanetary cold that always seeped into the warm house when he talked about space, when he was about to leave her for it. And this time it was worse than ever before.

He went on remorselessly, "Once the *Elsinore* reached the free-fall flight, where power could be shut off, the skipper had to put

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the ferry into an axial spin under power, creating artificial gravity to save the worthless life of that fool. So of course he lost his trajectory, and had to warp her in as best he could, without passing the Moon or crashing into it. And of course you're not listening."

"It's all so dull!" she had flared, and then, "How can I be interested in what some blundering space-jockey did?"

"Blun—Marcia, you really don't realize what that skipper did was the finest piece of shiphandling since mankind got off the ground."

"Was it?" she'd yawned. "Could you do it?"

"I—like to think I could," he said. "I'd hate to have to try."

She'd shrugged. "Then it can't be very difficult, darling."

She hadn't meant to be so cruel. Or so stupid. But when they were quarreling, or when he talked that repugnant, dedicated, other-world garble; something always went cold and furious and—lonely inside her, and made her fight back unfairly.

After he'd gone—for good, he said—her anger had sustained her for a few weeks. Then, bleakly, she knew she'd go to the ends of Earth for Jack. Or even to the Moon. . . .

SITTING rigid in the tense stillness of a rocket ship that was about to leap from Earth, Marcia started as an officer ducked his head into the passenger compartment from the pilot room's deep glow. But it wasn't Jack. The officer's lips moved hurriedly as he counted over the seats. He ducked back out of sight. From the bulkheads, the overhead, everywhere, came a deep, quiet rumble. Some of the passengers looked anxious, some excited, and some just leafed casually through magazines.

Now the brown-clad Miss Eagen was speaking from the head of the aisle.

"Those of you who haven't been in a rocket before won't find it much different from being in an airplane. At the same time—". She paused, quiet brown eyes solemn. "What you are about to experience is something that will make you proud to belong to the human race."

That again! thought Marcia furiously; and then all emotion left her but cold, ravening fear as the rumble heightened. She tried to close her eyes, her ears against it, but her mind wouldn't respond. She squirmed in her chair and found herself staring down at the field. It looked the way she felt—flat and pale and devoid of life, with a monstrous structure of terror squatting in it. The scene was abruptly splashed with a rushing sheet of flame that darkened the daytime sky. Then it was torn from her vision.

It was snatched away—the buildings, the trees, the roads surrounding the field seemed to pour in upon it, shrinking as they ran to-

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gether. Roads dried up like parched rivers, thinning and vanishing into the circle of her horrified vision. A great, soft, uniform weight pressed her down and back; she fought it, but it was too big and too soft.

Now Earth's surface was vague and Sun-splashed. Marcia's sense of loss tore at her. She put up her hands, heavily, and pressed the glass as if she could push it out, push herself out, go back, back to Earth and solidity. Clouds shot by like bullets, fell away until they were snowflakes roiling in violet haze. Then, in the purling universe that had grown around the ship, Earth was a mystic circle, a shallow dish floating darkly and heavily below.

"We are now," said Miss Eagen's calm voice, "thirty-seven miles over Los Angeles."

After that, there was scarcely room for thought—even for fear, though it lurked nearby, ready to leap. There was the ascent, the quiet, sleeplike ascent into space. Marcia very nearly forgot to breathe. She had been prepared for almost anything except this quality of peace and awe.

SHE didn't know how long she had been sitting there, awe-struck, spellbound, when she realized that she had to finish the job she'd started, and do it right now, this minute. It might already be too late . . . she wished, suddenly, and for the very first time, that she'd paid more attention to Jack's ramblings about orbits and turnover points and correction blasts, and all that gobbledegook. She glanced outside again and the sky was no longer deep blue, but black. She pressed herself up out of the soft chair—it was difficult, because of the one-and-a-half gravities the ship was holding—and plodded heavily up the aisle. Miss Eagen was just rising from the chair in which she sat for the take-off.

"Miss Eagen—"

"Yes, Mrs. Fos—why, what's the matter?"

Seeing the startled expression on the stewardess' face, Marcia realized she must be looking like a ghost. She put a hand to her cheek and found it clammy.

"Come along," said Miss Eagen cheerfully. She put a firm arm around Marcia's shoulder. "Just a touch of space-sickness. This way. *That's* it. We'll have you fixed up in a jiffy."

"It isn't s-space sickness," said Marcia in a very small and very positive voice. She let herself be led forward, through the door and to the left, where there was a small and compact ship's hospital.

"Now, now," said Miss Eagen briskly, "just you lie down there, Mrs. Foster. Does it hurt any special place?"

Marcia lay down gratefully. She closed her eyes tightly and said, "I'm not Mrs. Foster. It doesn't hurt."

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"You're not—" Miss Eagen apparently decided to take one thing at a time. "How do you feel?"

"Scared," said Marcia.

"Why, what is there to be scared of?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Well, that's no— You're *what?*"

"I'm Mrs. McHenry. I'm Jack's wife."

There was such a long pause that Marcia opened her eyes. Miss Eagen was looking at her levelly. She said, "I'll have to examine you."

"I know. Go ahead."

Miss Eagen did, swiftly and thoroughly. "You're so right," she breathed. She went to the small sink, stripping off her rubber gloves. With her back to Marcia, she said, "I'll have to tell the captain, you know."

"I know. I'd rather . . . tell him myself."

"Thanks," said Miss Eagen flatly. Marcia felt as if she'd been slapped. Miss Eagen dried her hands and crossed to an intercom. "Eagen to Captain."

"McHenry here."

"Captain McHenry, could you come back to the hospital right away?"

"Not right away, Sue." *Sue! No wonder he had found it so easy to walk out!* She looked at the trim girl with hating eyes. The intercom said, "You know I've got course-correction computations from here to yonder. Give me another forty minutes."

"I think," said Sue Eagen into the mike, "that the computations can wait."

"The hell you do!" The red contact light on the intercom went out.

"He'll be right here," said Miss Eagen.

MARCIA sat up slowly, clumsily. Miss Eagen did not offer to help. Marcia's hands strayed to her hair, patted it futilely.

He came in, moving fast and purposefully, as always. "Sue, what in time do you think you— *Marcia!*" His dark face broke into a delighted grin and he put his arms out. "You—you're here— *here*, on my ship!"

"I'm pregnant, Jack," she said. She put out a hand to ward him off. She couldn't bear the thought of his realizing what she had done while he had his arms around her.

"You *are?* You—we—" He turned to Miss Eagen, who nodded once, her face wooden. "Just find it out?"

This time Miss Eagen didn't react at all, and Marcia knew that she had to speak up. "No, Jack. I knew weeks ago."

There was no describable change in his face, but the taut skin of his space-tanned cheek seemed, somehow, to draw inward. His eyebrow ridges seemed to be more prominent, and he looked older, and

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very tired. Softly and slowly he asked, "What in God's name made you get on the ship?"

"I had to, Jack. I had to."

"Had to kill yourself?" he demanded brutally. "This tears it. This ties it up in a box with a bloody ribbon-bow. I suppose you know what this means—what I've got to do now?"

"Spin ship," she replied immediately, and looked up at him pertly, like a kindergarten child who knows she has the right answer.

He groaned.

"You said you could do it."

"I can . . . try," he said hollowly. "But—why, *why?*"

"Because," she said bleakly, "I learned long ago that a man grows to love what he has to fight for."

"And you were going to make me fight for you and the child—even if the lives of a hundred and seventy people were involved?"

"You said you could handle it. I thought you could."

"I'll try," he said wearily. "Oh, I'll try." He went out, dragging his feet, his shoulders down, without looking at her.

There was a stiff silence. Marcia looked up at Miss Eagen. "It's true, you know," she said. "A man grows to love the things he has to defend, no matter how he felt about them before."

The stewardess looked at her, her face registering a strange mixture of detachment and wonder. "You really believe that, don't you?"

Marcia's patience snapped. "You don't have to look so superior. I know what's bothering *you*. Well, he's *my* husband, and don't you forget it."

MISS EAGEN'S breath hissed in. Her eyes grew bright and she shook her head slightly. Then she turned on her heel and went to the intercom. Marcia thought for a frightened moment that she was going to call Jack back again. Instead she dialed and said, "Hospital to Maintenance. Petrucelli?"

"Petrucelli here."

"Come up with a crescent wrench, will you, Pet?"

Another stiff silence. A question curled into Marcia's mind and she asked it. "Do you work on all these ships at one time or another?"

Miss Eagen did not beat around the bush. "I've been with Captain McHenry for three years. I hope to work with him always. I think he's the finest in the Service."

"He—th-thinks as well of you, no doubt."

Petrucelli lounged in, a big man, easy-going, powerful. "What's busted, muscles?"

"Bolt the bed to the bulkhead, Pet. Mrs. McHenry—I'm sorry, but you'll have to get up."

Marcia bounced resentfully off the cot and stood aside. Petrucelli looked at her, cocked an eyebrow, looked at Miss Eagen, and asked, "Jaywalker?"

"Please hurry, Pet." She turned

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to Marcia. "I've got to explain to the passengers that there won't be any free fall. Most of them are looking forward to it." She went out.

Marcia watched the big man work for a moment. "Why are you putting the bed on the wall?"

He looked at her and away, quickly. "Because, lady, when we start to spin, that outside bulkhead is going to be *down*. Centrifugal force, see?" And before she could answer him he added, "I can't talk and work at the same time."

Feeling very much put-upon, Marcia waited silently until he was finished, and the bed hung ludicrously to the wall like a walking fly. She thanked him timidly, and he ignored it and went out.

Miss Eagen returned.

"That man was very rude," said Marcia.

Miss Eagen looked at her coolly. "I'm sorry," she said, obviously not meaning sorry at all.

Marcia wet her lips. "I asked you a question before," she said evenly. "About you and the captain."

"You did," said Sue Eagen. "Please don't."

"And why not?"

"Because," said Miss Eagen, and in that moment she looked almost as drawn as Jack had, "I'm supposed to be of service to the passengers at all times no matter what. If I have feelings at all, part of my job is to keep them to myself."

"Very courteous, I'm sure. However, I want to release you from your sense of duty. I'm *most* interested in what you have to say."

Miss Eagen's arched nostrils seemed pinched and white. "You really want me to speak my piece?"

IN ANSWER Marcia leaned back against the bulkhead and folded her arms. Miss Eagen gazed at her for a moment, nodded as if to herself, and said, "I suppose there always will be people who don't pay attention to the rules. Jaywalkers. But out here jaywalkers don't have as much margin for error as they do crossing against a traffic light on Earth." She looked Marcia straight in the eye. "What makes a jaywalker isn't ignorance. It's a combination of stupidity and stubbornness. The jaywalker does *know* better. In your case . . ."

She sighed. "It's well known—even by you—that the free-fall condition has a weird effect on certain people. The human body is in an unprecedented situation in free fall. Biologically it has experienced the condition for very short periods—falling out of trees, or on delayed parachute jumps. But it isn't constituted to take hour after hour of fall."

"What about floating in a pool for hours?" asked Marcia sullenly.

"That's quite a different situation. 'Down' exists when you're swimming. Free-fall means that everything around you is 'up.' The

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body's reactions to free-fall go much deeper than space-nausea and a mild feeling of panic. When there's a glandular imbalance of certain kinds, the results can be drastic. Apparently some instinctual part of the mind reacts as if there were a violent emergency, when no emergency is recognized by the reasoning part of the mind. There are sudden floods of adrenalin; the 17-kesteroids begin spastic secretions; the—well, it varies in individuals. But it's pretty well established that the results can be fatal. It kills men with prostate trouble—sometimes. It kills women in menopause—often. It kills women in the early stages of pregnancy—*always.*"

"But how?" asked Marcia, interested in spite of her resentment.

"Convulsions. A battle royal between a glandular-level panic and a violent and useless effort of the will to control the situation. Muscles tear, working against one another. Lungs rupture and air is forced into the blood-stream, causing embolism and death. Not everything is known about it, but I would guess that pregnant women are especially susceptible because their protective reflexes, through and through, are much more easily stimulated."

"And the only thing that can be done about it is to supply gravity?"

"Or centrifugal force (or centripetal, depending on where you're standing, but why be technical?)—or, better yet, keep those people off the ships."

"So now Jack will spin the ship until I'm pressed against the walls with the same force as gravity, and then everything will be all right."

"You make it sound so simple."

"There's no need to be sarcastic!" Marcia blurted. "Jack can do it. You think he can, don't you? Don't you?"

"He can do anything any space skipper has ever done, and more," said Sue Eagen, and her face glowed. "But it isn't easy. Right this minute he's working over the computer—a small, simple, shipboard computer—working out orbital and positional and blast-intensity data that would be a hard nut for the giant calculators on Earth to crack. And he's doing it in half the time—or less—than it would take the average mathematician, because he has to; because it's a life-and-death matter if he makes a mistake or takes too long."

"BUT—but—"

"But what?" Miss Eagen's composure seemed to have been blasted to shreds by the powerful currents of her indignation. Her eyes flashed. "You mean, but why doesn't he just work the ship while it's spinning the same way he does when it isn't?"

Through a growing fear, Marcia nodded mutely.

"He'll spin the ship on its long axis," said the stewardess with ex-

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aggerated patience. "That means that the steering jet tubes in the nose and tail are spinning, too. You don't just turn with a blast on one tube or another. The blasts have to be let off in hundreds of short bursts, timed to the hundredth of a second, to be able to make even a slight course correction. The sighting instruments are wheeling round and round while you're checking your position. Your fuel has to be calculated to the last ounce—because enough fuel for a Moon flight, with hours of fuelless free-fall, and enough fuel for a power spin and course corrections while spinning, are two very different things. Captain McHenry won't be able to maneuver to a landing on the Moon. He'll do it exactly right the first time, or not at all."

Marcia was white and still. "I—I never—"

"But I haven't told you the toughest part of it yet," Miss Eagen went on inexorably. "A ship as massive as this, spinning on its long axis, is a pretty fair gyroscope. It doesn't want to turn. Any force that tries to make it turn is resisted at right angles to the force applied. When that force is applied momentarily from jets, as they swing into position and away again, the firing formulas get—well, complex. And the ship's course and landing approach are completely new. Instead of letting the ship fall to the Moon, turning over and approaching tail-first with the main jets as brakes, Captain McHenry is going to have to start the spin first and go almost the whole way nose-first. He'll come up on the Moon obliquely, pass it, stop the spin, turn over once to check the speed of the ship, and once again to put the tail down when the Moon's gravity begins to draw us in. There'll be two short periods of free-fall there, but they won't be long enough to bother you much. And if we can do all that with the fuel we've got, it will be a miracle. A miracle from the brain of Captain McHenry."

Marcia forced herself away from the bulkhead with a small whimper of hurt and hatred—hatred of the stars, of this knowledgeable, inspired girl, and—even more so—of herself. She darted toward the door.

Miss Eagen was beside her in an instant, a hard small hand on her arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to stop him. He can't take that chance with his ship, with these people . . ."

"He will and he must. You surely know your husband."

"I know him as well as you do."

MISS EAGEN'S firm lips shut in a thin hard line. "Do as you like," she whispered. "And while you're doing it—think about whom he's spinning ship for." She took her hand from Marcia's arm.

Marcia twisted away and went into the corridor.

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She found herself at the entrance to the pilot room. In one sweeping glance she saw a curved, silver board. Before it a man sat tranquilly. Nearer to her was Jack, hunched over the keyboard of a complex, compact machine, like a harried bookkeeper on the last day of the month.

Her lips formed his name, but she was silent. She watched him, his square, competent hands, his detached and distant face. Through the forward view-plate she saw a harsh, jagged line, the very edge of the Moon's disc. Next to it, and below, was the rear viewer, holding the shimmering azure shape of Earth.

"All Earth watches me when I work, but with your eyes."

Jack had said that to her once, long ago, when he still loved her.

". . . human damnfoolishness botching up the equations . . ." He had said that once, too.

Miss Eagen was standing by the hospital door, watching her. When Marcia turned away without speaking to Jack, Miss Eagen smiled and held out her hand.

Marcia went to her and took the hand. They went into the hospital. Miss Eagen didn't speak; she seemed to be waiting.

"Yes, I know who Jack's spinning ship for," said Marcia.

Miss Eagen looked an unspoken question.

Marcia said, painfully, "He's like the Captain of the *Elsinore*. He's risking his life for a—a stranger. A jaywalker. Not for me. Not even for his baby."

"Does it hurt to know that?"

Marcia looked into the smooth, strong face and said with genuine astonishment, "Hurt? Oh, no! It's so—so big!"

There was a sudden thunder. Over Miss Eagen's shoulder, through the port, Marcia saw the stars begin to move. Miss Eagen followed her gaze. "He's started the spin. You'll be all right now."

MARCIA could never recall the rest of the details of the trip. There was the outboard bulkhead that drew her like a magnet, increasingly, until suddenly it wasn't an attracting wall, but normally and naturally "down." Then a needle, and another one, and a long period of deep drowsiness and unreality.

But through and through that drugged, relaxed period, Jack and the stars, the Moon and Sue Eagen danced and wove. Words slipped in and out of it like shreds of melody:

"A man comes to love the things he has to fight for." And Jack fighting—for his ship, for the Moon, for the new-building traditions of the great ones who would carry humanity out to the stars.

Sue Eagen was there, too, and the thing she shared with Jack. Of course there was something between them—so big a thing that

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there was nothing for her to fear in it.

Jack and Sue Eagen had always had it, and always would have; and now Marcia had it too. And with understanding replacing fear, Marcia was free to recall that Jack had worked with Sue Eagen—but it was Marcia that he had loved and married.

THERE was a long time of blackness, and then a time of agony, when she was falling, falling, and her lungs wanted to split, explode, disintegrate, and someone kept saying, "Hold tight, Marcia; hold tight to me," and she found Sue Eagen's cool strong hands in hers.

Marcia. She called me Marcia.

More blackness, more pain—but not so much this time; and then a long, deep sleep.

A curved ceiling, but a new curve, and soft rose instead of the gunmetal-and-chrome of the ship. White sheets, a new feeling of "down" that was unlike either Earth or the ship, a novel and exhilarating buoyancy. And kneeling by the bed—

"Jack!"

"You're all right, honey."

She raised herself on her elbow and looked out through the unglazed window at the ordered streets of the great Luna Dome. "The Moon . . . Jack, you did it!"

He snapped his fingers. He looked like a high-school kid. "Nothin' to it." She could see he was very proud. Very tired, too. He reached out to touch her.

She drew back. "You don't have to be sweet to me," she said quietly. "I understand how you must feel."

"Don't *have* to?" He rose, bent over her, and slid his arms around her. He put his face into the shadowed warmth between her hair and her neck and said, "Listen, egghead, there's no absolute scale for courage. We had a bad time, both of us. After it was over, and I had a chance to think, I used it trying to look at things through your eyes. And that way I found out that when you walked up that gangway, you did the bravest thing I've ever known anyone to do. And you did it for me. It doesn't matter what else happened. Sue told me a lot about you that I didn't know, darling. You're . . . real huge for your size. As for the bad part of what happened—nothing like it can ever happen again, can it?"

He hugged her. After a time he reached down and touched her swelling waist. It was like a benediction. "He'll be born on the Moon," he whispered, "and he'll have eyes the color of all Earth when it looks out to the stars."

"*She'll* be born on the Moon," corrected Marcia, "and her name will be Sue, and . . . and she'll be almost as good as her father."

—ROSS ROCKLYNNE

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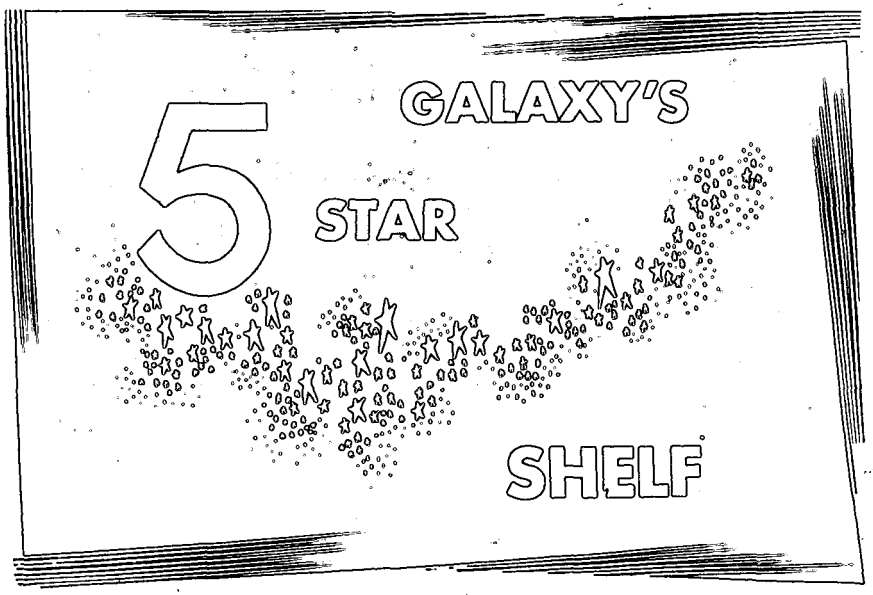

BY GROFF CONKLIN

THERE is a certain wry significance to a section of the *New York Times'* list of best sellers in the October 8, 1950 edition: Item 5 was "Dianetics;" item 6 was Overstreet's "The Mature Mind;" item 7 was Velikovsky; and item 9 was Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* (Henry Holt & Co., 230 pp. $2.75). It may be wondered how Dr. Overstreet likes the odd company he is forced to keep, for maturity is not the keynote here.

Certainly he would have some pungent things to say about the Scully opus. Assertedly a non-fiction job, this book is actually stranger than truth. It is also one of the worst-edited books of the decade. In addition to endless repititions which any editor above the age of fifteen should have eliminated, it floats on an uneasy sea of typographical errors, the most charming of which occurs in a sentence on page 192 which begins: "Captain roads, 'Residents in almost every section . . ." which requires long and puzzled thought to translate to "Caption reads, "Residents . . . etc."

Teeing off with the inevitable attacks on conventional science and

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military security that are the pseudo-scientists' substitutes for scientific proof, *Variety* columnist Scully leads the fascinated reader through bubbling suppositious "fact" and "inference" about the origins, nature and purposes of the flying saucers. He puts on exhibit a supposed geodesics expert, "Dr. Gee," who claims months of research on three flying discs which, he declares, the Air Force had found and sequestered. He describes two types of metal from the discs which are totally unfamiliar to Earth scientists; push-button control boards which the Air Force experts destroyed without attempting to analyze; and 3- to 4-foot human-seeming occupants (all dead) about whom the most remarkable things seem to have been their absolutely perfect teeth.

THE spice in Scully's barbecue is an analysis of what he believes to be the saucers' motive power, which turns out to be interplanetary magnetism. This is the product of a new science which has learned how to cut the magnetic lines of force holding the planets and the Sun in position and "thus" (says Scully) makes possible travel in space at speeds as high as 282,000 miles per second —and the back of the Scully hand to Dr. Einstein. According to the author, the Department of Defense has already spent over a billion dollars investigating this same force.

The book may be a compendium of scientific fact, superbly disguised as screwball gibberish. The disguise, in this case, is absolutely impenetrable. Whatever else it is, however, it is *not* dull!

While Scully's opus pretends to be true, Hugo Gernsback's "Ralph 124C 41+" (Frederick Fell, 207 pp., $2.50), originally published in 1911, contains a goodly number of then-fantastic scientific ideas that have since become fact. It also is a lot of fun to read. I admit that I approached the book with some trepidation, fearing that the writing and the concepts would be so amateur and so hoary with age that it would be unreadable. True enough, the plot *is* old-hat and the style *is* awkward—and even so "Ralph" is thoroughly delightful.

It is more like the last of the Jules Verne novels than the first of the modern period of science fiction, and in that lies its greatest merit, I believe. It has the genuine charm of a sound, workmanlike antique, plus the often astonishing survival value of successful prophecy. You will *not* be disappointed with this tale.

In the field of modern science fiction, Simon & Schuster has come out with a new Van Vogt. This one is called "The Voyage of the Space Beagle" (shades of Darwin!) (240 pp., $2.50). It is a skilful interweaving of three novelets,

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"Black Destroyer," "Discord in Scarlet," and a more recent item about birdlike people with incredible powers of hypnosis.

Holding the three together in a matrix of typically Van Vogtian metaphysical science is an interspersed narrative of the conflict between Elliott Grosvenor, Nexialist, and the rest of the *Beagle's* huge crew. Nexialism is a super-science which correlates and uses all other sciences, and Grosvenor naturally runs into opposition when he tries to use the other scientists on the ship for his own abstruse purposes. A magnificent exhibition of unleashed imagination at work, and particularly pleasant because it is written in intelligent English.

THE same things can be said for another item on the month's list—a seven-year-old book by a novelist and poet who is unfamiliar to most science fiction addicts. Its reissue in a pocket book gives me a chance to bring it to your attention. The book is Vincent McHugh's delightful "I Am Thinking of My Darling" (Signet Books, 224 pp., 25¢).

The story recounts what happens in New York City when a new kind of epidemic breaks out —a low-grade fever which causes the loss of all inhibitions, all conventions, all hatreds.

In the process of telling what happens when New York girls and New York men—and New York government agencies, too—"go natural," McHugh succeeds in giving us more sound and exciting microbiology, biochemistry, epidemiology and information on municipal government procedures than you could get in a year's course in any standard college. It's also a rollicking, lusty, absolutely real and handsomely written science fantasy.

The only anthology to cross my desk this month is "The Best Science Fiction Stories—1950" (Frederick Fell, 347 pp., $2.95.) This is Everett F. Bleiler's and T. E. Dikty's second in their annual series of selections from the previous year's short science fiction. Like the first one, it is generally a distinguished job. It contains 13 stories (including two each by Ray Bradbury and the Leinster-Jenkins symbiosis) and of them all but four rate B-plus or better on my personal scale of merit. A high average, indeed!

Our final item is the second in the science fiction series published by Greenberg, Publisher: "The Green Men of Graypec" by Festus Pragnell (185 pp., $2.50), a novel about which one can only say that it probably would have been better left in the quiet obscurity of the pulps where it first appeared. Following as it does Ted Sturgeon's fascinating "Dreaming Jewels" (see GALAXY for November 1950), the comedown is all the more painful.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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A Stone and a Spear

BY RAYMOND F. JONES

FROM Frederick to Baltimore, the rolling Maryland countryside lay under a fresh blanket of green. Wholly unaware of the summer glory, Dr. Curtis Johnson drove swiftly on the undulating highway, stirring clouds of dust and dried grasses.

Beside him, his wife, Louise, held her blowing hair away from her face and laughed into the warm air. "Dr. Dell isn't going to run away. Besides, you said we could call this a weekend vacation as well as a business trip."

Curt glanced at the speedometer and eased the pressure on the pedal. He grinned. "Wool-gathering again."

"What about?"

"I was just wondering who said it first—one of the fellows at Detrick, or that lieutenant at Bikini, or—"

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Given: The future is probabilities merging into one certainty. Proposition: Can the probabilities be made improbables so that the certainty becomes impossible?

Illustrated by JOHN BUNCH

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"Said *what?* What are you talking about?"

"That crack about the weapons after the next war. He—whoever it was—said there may be some doubt about what the weapons of the next war will be like, but there is absolutely no doubt about the weapons of World War IV. It will be fought with stones and spears. I guess any one of us could have said it."

Louise's smile grew tight and thin. "Don't any of you ever think of anything but the next war—*any* of you?"

"How can we? We're fighting it right now."

"You make it sound so hopeless."

"That's what Dell said in the days just before he quit. He said we didn't *have* to stay at Detrick producing the toxins and aerosols that will destroy millions of lives. But he never showed us how we could quit—and be sure of staying alive. His own walking out was no more than a futile gesture."

"I just can't understand him, Curt. I think he's right in a way, but what brought *him* to that viewpoint?"

"Hard to tell," Curt said, unconsciously speeding up again. "After the war, when the atomic scientists were publicly examining their consciences, Dell told them to examine their own guts first. That was typical of him then, but soon after, he swung just as strongly pacifist and walked out of Detrick."

"It still seems strange that he abandoned his whole career. The world's foremost biochemist giving up the laboratory for a *truck farm!*" Louise glanced down at the lunch basket between them. In it were tomatoes that Dr. Hamon Dell had sent along with his invitation to visit him.

FOR nearly a year Dr. Dell had been sending packages of choice fruit and vegetables to his former colleagues, not only at the biological warfare center at Camp Detrick but at the universities and other research centers throughout the country.

"I wish we knew exactly why he asked us to come out," said Louise.

"Nobody claims to have figured him out. They laugh a little at him now. They eat his gifts willingly enough, but consider him slightly off his rocker. He still has all his biological talents, though. I've never seen or tasted vegetables like the ones he grows."

"And the brass at Detrick doesn't think he's gone soft in the head, either," she added much too innocently. "So they ordered you to take advantage of his invitation and try to persuade him to come back."

Curt turned his head so sharply that Louise laughed.

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"No, I didn't read any secret, hush-hush papers," she said. "But it's pretty obvious, isn't it, the way you rushed right over to General Hansen after you got the invitation?"

"It *is* hush-hush, top-secret stuff," said Curt, his eyes once more on the road. "The Army doesn't want it to leak, but they need Dell, need him badly. Anyone knowing bio-war developments would understand. They wanted to send me before. Dell's invitation was the break we needed. I may be the one with sufficient influence to bring him back. I hope so. But keep it under your permanent and forget your guessing games. There's more to it than you know."

The car passed through a cool, wooded section and Louise leaned back and drank in the beauty of it.

"Hush-hush, top secret stuff," she said. "Grown men playing children's games."

"Pretty deadly games for children, darling."

IN THE late afternoon they bypassed the central part of Baltimore and headed north beyond the suburb of Towson toward Dell's truck farm.

His sign was visible for a half mile:

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT
Eat the Best
EAT DELL'S VEGETABLES

"Dr. Hamon Dell, world's foremost biochemist—and truck farmer," Curt muttered as he swung the car off the highway.

Louise stepped out when the tires ceased crunching on the gravel lane. She scanned the fields and old woods beyond the ancient but preserved farmhouse. "It's so unearthly."

Curt followed. The song of birds, which had been so noticeable before, seemed strangely muted. The land itself was an alien, faintly greenish hue, a color repulsive to more than just the eyes.

"It must be something in this particular soil," said Curt, "something that gives it that color and produces such wonderful crops. I'll have to remember to ask Dell about it."

"You want Dr. Dell?"

They whirled at the sound of an unfamiliar voice. Louise uttered a startled cry.

The gaunt figure behind them coughed asthmatically and pointed with an arm that seemed composed only of bones and brownish skin, so thin as to be almost translucent.

"Yes," said Curt shakenly. "We're friends of his."

"Dell's in back. I'll tell him you're here."

The figure shambled away and Louise shook herself as if to rid her mind of the vision. "If our grandchildren ever ask about zom-

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bies, I can tell them. Who in the world do you suppose he is?"

"Hired man, I suppose. Sounds as if he should be in a lung sanatarium. Funny that Dell would keep him around in that condition."

From somewhere behind the house came the sound of a truck engine. Curt took Louise's arm and led her around the trim, graveled path.

The old farmhouse had been very carefully renovated. Everywhere was evidence of exqusite care, yet the cumulative atmosphere remained uninviting, almost oppressive. Curt told himself it was the utter silence, made even more tense by the lonely chugging of the engine in back, and the incredible harsh color of the soil beneath their feet.

ROUNDING the corner, they came in sight of a massive tank truck. From it a hose led to an underground storage tank and pulsed slowly under the force of the liquid gushing through it. No one was in sight.

"What could that be for?" asked Louise.

"You've got me. Could be gasoline, but Dell hasn't any reason for storing that much here."

They advanced slowly and amazement crept over Curt as he comprehended the massiveness of the machine. The tank was of elliptical cross section, over ten feet on its major axis. Six double wheels supported the rear; even the front ones were double. In spite of such wide weight distribution, the tires were pressing down the utterly dry ground to a depth of an inch or more.

"They must haul liquid lead in that thing," said Curt.

"It's getting cool. I wish Dell would show up." Louise glanced out over the twenty-acre expanse of truck farm. Thick rows of robust plants covered the area. Tomatoes, carrots, beets, lettuce, and other vegetables—a hundred or so fruit trees were at the far end. Between them ran the road over which the massive truck had apparently entered the farm from the rear.

A heavy step sounded abruptly and Dell's shaggy head appeared from around the end of the truck. His face lighted with pleasure.

"Curt, my boy! And Louise! I thought you weren't going to show up at all."

Curt's hand was almost lost in Dell's enormous grip, but it wasn't because of that that his grip was passive. It was his shocked reaction to Dell's haggard appearance. The fierce eyes looked merely old and tired now. The ageless, leathery hide of Dell's face seemed to have collapsed before some overpowering decay, its bronze smoothness shattered by deep lines that were like tool marks of pain.

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Curt spoke in a subdued voice. "It's hard to get away from Detrick. Always one more experiment to try—"

"—And the brass riding you as if they expected you to win another war for them tomorrow afternoon," said Dell. "I remember."

"We wondered about this truck," Louise commented brightly, trying to change the subject. "We finally gave up on it."

"Oh, that. It brings liquid fertilizer to pump into my irrigation water, that's all. No mystery. Let's go on to the house. After you're settled we can catch up on everything and I'll tell you about the things I'm doing here."

"Who's the man we saw?" asked Curt. "He looks as if his health is pretty precarious."

"That's Brown. He came with the place—farmed it for years for my uncle before I inherited it. He could grow a garden on a granite slab. In spite of appearances, he's well enough physically."

"How has your own health been? You have—changed—since you were at Detrick."

Dell raised a lock of steel-gray hair in his fingers and dismissed the question with a wan smile. "We all wear out sometime," he said. "My turn had to come."

INSIDE, some of the oppressiveness vanished as the evening passed. It was cool enough for lighting the fireplace, and they settled before it after dinner. While they watched the flickering light that whipped the beamed ceiling, Dell entertained them with stories of his neighbors, whose histories he knew clear back to Revolutionary times.

Early, however, Louise excused herself. She knew they would want privacy to thresh out the purposes behind Dell's invitation—and Curt's acceptance.

When she was gone, there was a moment's silence. The logs crackled with shocking pistol shots in the fireplace. The scientist moved to stir the coals and then turned abruptly to Curt.

"When are you going to leave Detrick?"

"When are *you* coming back?" Curt demanded instead of answering.

"So they still want me, even after the things I said when I left."

"You're needed badly. When I told Hansen I was coming down, he said it would be worth five years of my own work to bring you back."

"They want me to produce even deadlier toxins than those I gave them," Dell said viciously. "They want some that can kill ten million people in four minutes instead of only one million—"

"Any man would go insane if he looked at it that way. It would be the same as gun-makers being tormented by the vision of torn

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men destroyed by their bullets, the sorrowing families—"

"And why shouldn't the gun-makers be tormented?" Dell's voice was low with controlled hate. "They are men like you and me who give the *war*-makers new tools for their trade."

"Oh, Dell, it's not as simple as that." Curt raised a hand and let it fall wearily. They had been over this so many times before. "Weapon designers are no more responsible than any other agents of society. It's pure neurosis to absorb the whole guilt of wars yet unfought merely because you happened to have developed a potential weapon."

Dell touched the massive dome of his skull. "Here within this brain of mine has been conceived a thing which will probably destroy a billion human lives in the coming years. D. triconus toxin in a suitable aerosol requires only a countable number of molecules in the lungs of a man to kill him. My brain and mine alone is responsible for that vicious, murderous discovery."

"Egotism! Any scientist's work is built upon the pyramid of past knowledge."

"THE weapon I have described exists. If I had not created it, it would not exist. It is as simple as that. No one shares my guilt and my responsibility. And what more do they want of me now? What greater dream of mass slaughter and destruction have they dreamed?"

"They want you," said Curt quietly, "because they believe we are not the only ones possessing the toxin. They need you to come back and help find the antitoxin for D. triconus."

Dell shook his head. "That's a blind hope. The action of D. triconus is like a match set to a powder train. The instant its molecules contact protoplasm, they start a chain reaction that rips apart the cell structure. It spreads like fire from one cell to the next, and nothing can stop it once it's started operating within a given organism."

"But doesn't this sense of guilt —unwarranted as it is—make you *want* to find an antitoxin?"

"Suppose I succeeded? I would have canceled the weapon of an enemy. The military would know he could nullify ours in time. Then they would command me to work out still another toxin. It's a vicious and insane circle, which must be broken somewhere. The purpose of the entire remainder of my life is to break it."

"When you are fighting for your life and the enemy already has his hands about your throat," Curt argued, "you reach for the biggest rock you can get your hands on and beat his brains in. You don't try to persuade him that killing is unethical."

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For an instant it seemed to Curt that a flicker of humor touched the corners of Dell's mouth. Then the lines tightened down again.

"Exactly," he said. "You reach for a rock and beat his brains in. You don't wipe human life off the face of the Earth in order to reach that enemy. I asked you to come down here to help me break this circle of which I spoke. There has to be someone here—after I'm gone—"

Dell's eyes shifted to the depths of shadows beyond the firelight and remained fixed on unseen images.

"Me? Help you?" Curt asked incredulously. "What could I do? Give up science and become a truck gardener, too?"

"You might say that we would be in the rock business," replied Dell. "Fighting is no longer on the level of one man with his hands about another's throat, but it *should* be. Those who want power and domination should have to fight for it personally. But it has been a long time since they had to.

"EVEN in the old days, kings and emperors hired mercenaries to fight their wars. The militarists don't buy swords now. They buy brains. We're the mercenaries of the new day, Curt, you and I. Once there was honor in our profession. We searched for truth for its own sake, and because it was our way of life. Once we were the hope of the world because science was a universal language.

"What a horrible joke that turned out to be! Today we are the terror of the world. The warmakers built us fine laboratories, shining palaces, and granted every whim—for a price. They took us up to the hills and showed us the whole world and we sold our souls for it.

"Look what happened after the last war. Invading armies carried off prize Nazi brains like so much loot, set the scientists up in big new laboratories, and these new mercenaries keep right on pouring out knowledge for other kings and emperors.

"Their loyalty is only to their science. But they can't experiment for knowledge any more, only weapons and counter-weapons. You'll say I'm anti-war, even, perhaps, anti-American or pro-Russian. I am not against just wars, but I am against unjust slaughter. And I love America too much to let her destroy herself along with the enemy."

"Then what are we to do?" Curt demanded fiercely. "What are we to do while enemy scientists prepare these same weapons to exterminate *us?* Sure, it's one hell of a mess. Science is already dead. The kind you talk about has been dead for twenty years. All our fine ideals are worthless until the poli-

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ticians find a solution to their quarrels."

"Politicians? Since when did men of science have to wait upon politicians for solutions of human problems?" Dell passed a hand over his brow, and suddenly his face contorted in pain.

"What is it?" Curt exclaimed, rising.

"Nothing—nothing, my boy. Some minor trouble I've had lately. It will pass in a moment."

With effort, he went on. "I wanted to say that already you have come to think of science being divided into armed camps by the artificial boundaries of the politicians. Has it been so long ago that it was not even in your lifetime, when scientists regarded themselves as one international brotherhood?"

"I can't quarrel with your ideals," said Curt softly. "But national boundary lines do, actually, divide the scientists of the world into armed camps."

"YOUR premises are still incorrect. They do not deliberately war on each other. It is only that they have blindly sold themselves as mercenaries. And they can be called upon to redeem themselves. They can break their unholy contracts."

"There would have to be simultaneous agreement among the scientists of all nations. And they are men, influenced by national ideals. They are not merely ivory-tower dabblers and searchers after truth."

"Do you remember me five years ago?" Dell's face became more haggard, as if the memory shamed him. "Do you remember when I told the atomic scientists to examine their guts instead of their consciences?"

"Yes. You certainly *have* changed."

"And so can other men. There is a way. I need your help desperately, Curt—"

The face of the aging biochemist contorted again with unbearable pain. His forehead beaded with sweat as he clenched his skull between his vein-knotted hands.

"Dell! What is it?"

"It will pass," Dr. Dell breathed through clenched teeth. "I have some medicine—in my bedroom. I'm afraid I'll have to excuse myself tonight. There's so much more I have to say to you, but we'll continue our talk in the morning, Curt. I'm sorry—"

He stumbled out, refusing Curt's offer of aid with a grim headshake. The fire crackled loudly within the otherwise silent room. Curt felt cold at the descending chill of the night, his mind bewildered at Dell's barrage, some of it so reasonable, some of it so utterly confused. And there was no clue to the identity of the powerful force that had made so

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great a change in the once militant scientist.

Slowly Curt mounted the staircase of the old house and went to the room Dell had assigned them. Louise was in bed reading a murder mystery.

"Secret mission completed?" she asked.

Curt sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm afraid something terrible is wrong with Dell. Besides the neurotic guilt complex because of his war work, he showed signs of a terrific and apparently habitual pain in his head. If that should be brain tumor, it might explain his erratic notions, his abandonment of his career."

"Oh, I hope it's not that!"

IT SEEMED to Curt that he had slept only minutes before he was roused by sounds in the night. He rolled over and switched on the light. His watch said two o'clock. Louise raised up in sharp alarm.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"I thought I heard something. There it is again!"

"It sounds like someone in pain. It must be Dell!"

Curt leaped from the bed and wrestled into his bathrobe. As he hurried toward Dell's room, there was another deep groan that ended in a shuddering sob of unbearable agony.

He burst into the scientist's room and switched on the light. Dell looked up, eyes glazed with pain.

"Dr. Dell!"

"Curt— I thought I had time left, but this is as far as I can go— Just remember all I said tonight. Don't forget a word of it." He sat up rigidly, hardly breathing in the effort of control. "The responsibility for the coming destruction of civilization lies at the doors of the scientist mercenaries. Don't allow it, Curt. Get them to abandon the laboratories of the warriors. Get them to reclaim their honor—"

He fell back upon the pillow, his face white with pain and shining with sweat. "Brown—see Brown. He can tell you the—the rest."

"I'll go for a doctor," said Curt. "Who have you had? Louise will stay with you."

"Don't bring a doctor. There's no escaping this. I've known it for months. Wait here with me, Curt. I'll be gone soon."

Curt stared with pity at the great scientist whose mind had so disintegrated. "You need a doctor. I'll call a hospital, Johns Hopkins, if you want."

"Wait, maybe you're right. I have no phone here. Get Dr. Wilson—the Judge Building, Towson—find his home address in a phone book."

"Fine. I'll only be a little while."

He stepped to the door.

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"Curt! Take the lane down to the new road—behind the farm. Quicker—it cuts off a mile or so—go down through the orchard—"

"All right. Take it easy now. I'll be right back."

Curt frantically got dressed, ran down the stairs and out to the car. He wondered absently what had become of the cadaverous Brown, who seemed to have vanished from the premises.

THE wheels spun gravel as he started the car and whipped it out of the driveway. Then he was on the stretch of lane leading through the grove. The moonless night was utterly dark, and the stream of light ahead of the car seemed the only living thing upon the whole landscape. He almost wished he had taken the more familiar road. To get lost now might mean death for Dell.

No traffic flowed past him in either direction. There were no buildings showing lights. Overwhelming desolation seemed to possess the countryside and seep into his soul. It seemed impossible that this lay close to the other highway with which he was familiar.

He strained his eyes into the darkness for signs of an all-night gas station or store from which he could phone. Finally, he resigned himself to going all the way to Towson. At that moment he glimpsed a spark of light far ahead.

Encouraged, Curt stepped on the gas. In less than ten minutes he was at the spot. He braked the car to a stop, and surveyed the building as he got out. It seemed more like a power substation than anything else. But there should be a telephone, at least.

He knocked on the door. Almost instantly, footsteps sounded within.

The door swung wide.

"I wonder if I could use your—" Curt began. He gasped. "Brown! Dell's dying—we've got to get a doctor for him—"

As if unable to comprehend, the hired man stared dumbly for a long moment. His hollow-cheeked face was almost skeletal in the light that flooded out from behind him.

Then from somewhere within the building came a voice, sharp with tension. "Brown! What the devil are you doing? Shut that door!"

That brought the figure to life. He whipped out a gun and motioned Curt inward. "Step inside. We'll have to decide what to do with you when Carlson finds you're here."

"What's the matter with you?" Curt asked, stupefied. "Dell's dying. He needs help."

"Get in here!"

Curt moved slowly forward. Brown closed the door behind him

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and motioned toward a closed door at the other end of a short hall. They opened it and stepped into a dimly lighted room.

Curt's eyes slowly adjusted and he saw what seemed to be a laboratory. It was so packed with equipment that there was scarcely room for the group of twelve or fifteen men jammed closely about some object with their backs to Curt and Brown.

Brown shambled forward like an agitated skeleton, breaking the circle. Then Curt saw that the object of the men's attention was a large cathode ray screen occupied by a single green line. There was a pip on it rising sharply near one side of the two-foot tube. The pip moved almost imperceptibly toward a vertical red marker over the face of the screen. The men stared as if hypnotized by it.

THE newcomers' arrival, however, disturbed their attention. One man turned with an irritable growl. "Brown, for heaven's sake—"

He was a bony creature, even more cadaverous than Brown. He caught sight of Curt's almost indecently robust face. He gasped and swore.

"Who is this? What's he doing here?"

The entire montage of skull faces turned upon Curt. He heard a sharp collective intake of breath, as if his presence were some unforeseen calamity that had shaken the course of their incomprehensible lives.

"This is Curtis Johnson," said Brown. "He got lost looking for a doctor for Dell."

A mummylike figure rose from a seat before the instrument. "Your coming is tremendously unfortunate, but for the moment we can do nothing about it. Sit here beside me. My name is Tarron Sark."

The man indicated a chair.

"My friend, Dr. Dell, is dying," Curt snapped out, refusing to sit down. "I've got to get help. I saw your light and hoped you'd allow me to use your phone. I don't know who you are nor what Dell's hired man is doing here with you. But you've got to let me go for help!"

"No." The man, Sark, shook his head. "Dell is reconciled. He has to go. We are awaiting precisely the event you would halt—his death."

He had known it, Curt thought, from the moment he entered that room. Like vultures sitting on cliffs waiting for the death of their prey, these fantastic men let their glance slip back to the screen. The green line was a third of the way toward the red marker now, and moving more rapidly.

It was nightmare—meaningless—

"I'm not staying," Curt insisted. "You can't prevent me from help-

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ing Dell without assuming responsibility for his death. I demand you let me call."

"You're not going to call," said Sark wearily. "And we assumed responsibility for Dell's death long ago. Sit down!"

Slowly Curt sank down upon the chair beside the stranger. There was nothing else to do. He was powerless against Brown's gun. But he'd bring them to justice somehow, he swore.

He didn't understand the meaning of the slowly moving pattern on the 'scope face, yet, as his eyes followed that pip, he sensed tension in the watching men that seemed sinister, almost murderous. How?

What did the inexorably advancing pip signify?

NO ONE spoke. The room was stifling hot and the breathing of the circle of men was a dull, rattling sound in Curt's ears.

Quickly then, gathering sudden momentum, the pip accelerated. The circle of men grew taut.

The pip crossed the red line—and vanished.

Only the smooth green trace remained, motionless and without meaning.

With hesitant shuffling of feet, the circle expanded. The men glanced uncertainly at one another.

One said, "Well, that's the end of Dell. We'll soon know now if we're on the right track, or if we've botched it. Carlson will call when he's computed it."

"The end of Dell?" Curt repeated slowly, as if trying to convince himself of what he knew had happened. "The pip on the screen—that showed his life leaving him?"

"Yes," said Sark. "He knew he had to go. And there are perhaps hundreds more like him. But Dell couldn't have told you of that—"

"What will we do with him?" Brown asked abruptly.

"If Dell is dead, you murdered him!" Curt shouted.

A rising personal fear grew within him. They could not release him now, even though his story would make no sense to anybody. But they had somehow killed Dell, or thought they had, and they wouldn't hesitate to kill Curt. He thought of Louise in the great house with the corpse of Haman Dell—if, of course, he was actually dead. But that was nonsense. . . .

"Dell must have sent you to us!" Sark said, as if a great mystery had suddenly been lifted from his mind. "He did not have time to tell you everything. Did he tell you to take the road behind the farm?"

Curt nodded bitterly. "He told me it was the quickest way to get to a doctor."

"He did? Then he knew even better than we did how rapidly he

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was slipping. Yes, this was the quickest way."

"What are you talking about?" Curt demanded.

"Did Dell say anything at all about what he wanted of you?"

"It was all wild. Something about helping with some crazy plans to retreat from the scientific world. He was going to finish talking in the morning, but I guess it wouldn't have mattered. I realize now that he was sick and irrational."

"Too sick to explain everything, but not irrational," Sark said thoughtfully. "He left it to us to tell you, since you are to succeed him."

"Succeed Dell? In what?"

SARK suddenly flipped a switch on a panel at his right. A screen lighted with some fuzzy image. It cleared with a slight dial adjustment, and Curt seemed to be looking at some oddly familiar moonlit ruin.

"An American city," said Sark, hurrying his words now. "Any city. They are all alike. Ruin. Death. This one died thirty years ago."

"I don't understand," Curt complained, bewildered. "Thirty years—"

"At another point in the Time Continuum," said Sark. "The future. Your future, you understand. Or, rather, *our* present, the one you created for us."

Curt recoiled at the sudden venom in Sark's voice. "The *future?*" That was what they had in common with Dell—psychosis, systematic delusions. He had suspected danger before; now it was imminent and terrifying.

"Perhaps you are one of those who regard your accomplishments with pride," Sark went on savagely, ignoring or unaware of Curt's fear and horror. "That the hydrogen bombs smashed the cities, and the aerosols destroyed the remnants of humanity seems insignificant to you beside the high technical achievement these things represent."

Curt's throat was dry with panic. Irrelevantly, he recalled the pain-fired eyes of Dell and the dying scientist's words: "The responsibility for the coming destruction of civilization lies at the doors of the scientist mercenaries—".

"Some of us *did* manage to survive," said Sark, glaring at the scene of gaunt rubble. Curt could see the veins pounding beneath the thin flesh of his forehead. "We lived for twenty years with the dream of rebuilding a world, the same dream that has followed all wars. But at last we knew that the dream was truly vain this time. We survivors lived in heremetically sealed caverns, trying to exist and recover our lost science and technology.

"We could not emerge into the Earth's atmosphere. Its pollution

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with virulent aerosols would persist for another hundred years. We could not bear a new race out of these famished and rickety bodies of ours. Unless Man was to vanish completely from the face of the Earth, we had only a single hope. That hope was to prevent the destruction from ever occurring!"

Sark's eyes were burning now. "Do you understand what that means? We had to go *back*, not forward. We had to arm to fight a new war, a war to prevent the final war that destroyed Mankind."

"Back? How could you go back?" Curt hesitated, grasping now the full insanity of the scene about him. "How have you *come* back?" He waited tautly for the answer. It would be gibberish, of course, like all the mad conversation before it.

"THE undisturbed flow of time from the beginning to the end—neither of which we can experience—we call the Prime Continuum," Sark replied. "Mathematically speaking, it is composed of billions of separate bands of probability running side by side. For analogy, you may liken it to a great river, whose many insignificant tributaries merge into a roaring, turbulent whole. That is the flow of time, the Prime Continuum.

"You may change one of these tributaries, dam it up, turn it aside, let it reach the main stream at a different point. No matter how insignificant the tributary, the stream will not be the same after the change. That is what we are doing. We are controlling critical tributaries of the Prime Continuum, altering the hell that you scientists have so generously handed down to us.

"Dell was a critical tributary. You, Dr. Curtis Johnson, are another. Changing or destroying such key individuals snips off branches of knowledge before they come into fruit."

It was an ungraspable answer, but it had to be argued against because of its conclusion. "The scientists are not bringing about the war," Curt said, looking from one fleshless face to another. "Find the politicians responsible, those willing to turn loose any horror to gain power. *They* are the ones you want."

"That would mean destroying half the human race. In your day, nearly every man is literally a politician."

"Talk sense!" Curt said angrily.

"A politician, as we have come to define him, is simply one willing to sacrifice the common good for his own ends. It is a highly infectious disease in a day when altruism is taken for cowardice or mere stupidity. No, we have not mistaken our goal, Dr. Johnson. We cannot hasten the maturity of the race. We can only hope to take

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the matches away so the children cannot burn the house down. Whatever you doubt, do not doubt that we are from the future or that we caused Dell's death. He is only one of many."

Curt slumped. "I did doubt it. I still do, yet not with conviction. Why?"

"Because your own sense of guilt tells you that you and Dell and others like you are literally the matches which we have to remove. Because your knowledge of science has overcome your desire not to believe. Because you *know* the shape of the future."

"The war after the Third World War—" Curt murmured. "Someone said it would be fought with stones and spears, but your weapons are far from stones and spears."

"Perhaps not so far at that," said Sark, his face twisting wryly. He reached to a nearby table and picked up a tomato and a carrot. "These are our weapons. As humble and primitive as the stones and spears of cavemen."

"YOU'RE joking," Curt replied, almost ready to grin.

"No. This is the ultimate development of biological warfare. Man is what he eats—"

"That's what Dell's sign said."

"We operate hundreds of gardens and farms such as Dell's. We work through the fertilizing compounds we supply to these farms. These compounds contain chemicals that eventually lodge in the cells of those who eat the produce. They take up stations within the brain cells and change the man—or destroy him.

"Certain cells of the brain are responsible for specific characteristics. Ways of altering these cells were found by introducing minute quantities of specific radioactive materials which could be incorporated into vegetable foods. During the Third War wholesale insanity was produced in entire populations by similar methods. Here, we are using it to accomplish humane purposes.

"We are simply restraining the scientists responsible for the destroying weapons that produced our nightmare world. You saw the change that took place in Dell. There is a good example of what we do."

"But he *did* change," Curt pointed out. "He *was* carrying out your work. Wasn't that enough for you? Why did you decide he had to die?"

"Ordinarily, we don't want to kill if the change is produced. Sometimes the brain cells are refractory and the characteristics too ingrained. The cells develop tumorous activity as a result of the treatment. So it was with Dell. In his case, however, we would have been forced to kill him by other means if he had not died as he did. This, too, he understood very

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well. That was why he really wanted no doctor to help him."

"You must have driven him insane first!"

"Look at this and see if you still think so." Sark led the way to a small instrument and pointed to the eyepiece of it. "Look in there."

Curt bent over. Light sprang up at Sark's touch of a switch. Then a scene began to move before Curt's eyes.

"Dell!" he exclaimed.

The scene was of some vast and well-equipped biological laboratory, much like those of Camp Detrick. Silent, mask-faced technicians moved with precision about their tasks. Dr. Dell was directing operations.

But there was something wrong. The figure was not the Dell that Curt knew.

As if Sark sensed Curt's comprehension of this, the scene advanced and swelled until the whole area of vision was filled with Dell's face. Curt gasped. The face was blank and hideous. The eyes stared. When the scene retreated once more, Curt saw now that Dell moved as an automaton, almost without volition of his own.

AS HE moved away from the bench like a sleepwalker, there came briefly into view the figure of an armed guard at the door. The figure of a corporal, grim in battle dress.

Curt looked up, sick as if some inner sense had divined the meaning of that scene which he could not yet put into words.

"Had enough?" asked Sark.

"What does it mean?"

"That is Dell as he would have been. That is what he was willing to die to avoid."

"But what *is* it?"

"A military research laboratory twelve years into your future. You are aware that in your own time a good deal of research has come to a standstill because many first-string scientists have revolted against military domination. Unfortunately, there are plenty of second-stringers available and they are enough for most tasks—the youngsters with new Ph. D.s who are awed by the glitter of golden laboratories. But, lacking experience or imagination, they can't see through the glitter or have the insight for great work. Some will eventually, too late, however, and they will be replaced by eager new youngsters."

"This scene of Dell—"

"Just twelve years from what you call now. Deadlier weapons will be needed and so a bill will be passed to draft the reluctant first-line men—against their will, if necessary."

"You can't force creative work," Curt objected.

Sark shrugged. "There are drugs that do wonderful and terrible things to men's minds.

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They can force creation or mindless destruction, confession or outrageous subterfuge. You saw your opponents make some use of them. A cardinal, for example, and an engineer, among others. Now you have seen your friend, Dell, as he would have been. Not the same drugs, of course, but the end result is the same."

Curt's horror turned to stubborn disbelief. "America wouldn't use such methods," he said flatly.

"Today? No," agreed Sark. "But when a country is committed to inhuman warfare—even though the goal may be honorable—where is the line to stop at? Each brutality prepares the way for the next. Even concentration camps and extermination centers become logical necessities. You have heard your opponents say that the end justifies the means. You have seen for yourself—the means become the end."

"But Dell could have escaped," Curt protested. "You could have helped him to your own time or another. He was still valuable. He needn't have died!"

"There is no such thing as actual travel in time," explained Sark. "Or at least in our day we have found none. There is possible only a bending back of a branch of the Prime Continuum so that we can witness, warn, instruct, gain aid in saving the future. And there can be meeting only in this narrow sector of unreality where the branch joins the main stream. Our farms adjoin such sectors, but farther than that we cannot go, nor can one of you become a citizen of the world you have created for us.

"But I wish it were so!" Sark bit out venomously. "We'd kidnap you by the millions, force you to look upon the ruin and the horror, let you breathe the atmosphere that no man can inhale and live, the only atmosphere there is in that world. Yes, I wish you could become our guests there. Our problem would be easier. But it can't be done. This is the only way we can work.

"Dell had to go. There was no escape for him, no safety for us if he lived. He would have been tracked down, captured like a beast and set to work against his will. It was there in the Prime Continuum. Nothing could cancel it except death, the death that saves a billion lives because he will not produce a toxin deadlier than D. triconus."

THE vengeance in Sark's voice was almost tangible. Involuntarily Curt retreated a step before it. And—almost—he thought he understood these men out of time.

"What is there—" he began hoarsely and had to stop. "What is there that I can do?"

"We need you to take over Dell's farm. It is of key impor-

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tance. The list of men he was treating was an extremely vital one. That work cannot be interrupted now."

"How can you accomplish anything by operating only here?" Curt objected. "While you stifle our defenses, our enemies are arming to the teeth. When you've made us sufficiently helpless, they'll strike."

"Did I say we were so restricted?" answered Sark, smiling for the first time. "You cannot imagine what a fresh vegetable means on a professor's table in Moscow. In Atomgrad a ripe tomato is worth a pound of uranium. How do I know? Because I walked the streets of Atomgrad with my grandfather."

"Then you're a—"

Sark's face grew hard and bitter in the half light of the room. "Was," he corrected. "Or might have been. There are no nationalities where there are no nations, no political parties where there are only hunger and death. The crime of the future is not any person's or country's. It is the whole of humanity's."

An alarm sounded abruptly.

"Carlson!" someone tensely exclaimed.

Sark whirled to the panels and adjusted the controls. A small screen lighted, showing the image of a man with graying hair and imperious face. His sharp eyes seemed to burn directly into Curt's.

"How did it go?" exclaimed Sark. "Was the Prime Continuum shift as expected?"

"No! It still doesn't compute out. Nothing's right. The war is still going on. The Continuum is absolute hell."

"I should have known," said Sark in dismay. "I should have called you."

"What is it? Do you know what's wrong?"

"Johnson. Dr. Curtis Johnson. He's here."

RAGE spread upon Carlson's face. An oath exploded from his lips. "No wonder the situation doesn't compute with him out of the Prime Continuum. Why did he come there?"

"Dell sent him. Dell died too quickly. He didn't have time to instruct Johnson. I have told him what we want of him."

"Do you understand?" Carlson demanded of Curt with abruptness that was almost anger.

Curt looked slowly about the room and back to the face of his questioner. Understand? If they sent him back, allowed him to go back, could he ever be sure that he had not witnessed a thing of nightmare in this shadowy dream world?

Yes, he could be sure. He had seen the blasted city, just the way he knew it could be—*would* be unless someone prevented it. He had seen the pattern on the scope,

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attuned to the tiny tributary of the Prime Continuum that was the life of Dr. Dell, had seen it run out, dying as Dell had died.

He could believe, too, that there was a little farm near Atomgrad, where a tomato on a scientist's table was more potent than the bombs building in the arsenal.

"I understand," he said. "Shall I go back now?"

Sark put a paper into his hands. "Here is a list of new names. You will find Dell's procedures and records in his desk at the farm. Do not underestimate the importance of your work. You have seen the failure of the Prime Continuum to compute properly with you out of it. You will correct that.

"Your only contact from now on will be through Brown, who will bring the tank truck once a year. You know what to do. You are on your own."

It was like a surrealist painting as he left. The moon had risen, and in all the barrenness there was nothing but the gray cement cube of the building. The light spilling through the open doorway touched the half dozen gaunt men who had followed him out to the car. Ahead was the narrow band of roadway leading through some infinite nothingness that would end in Dell's truck farm.

HE STARTED off. When he looked back a moment later, the building was no longer there.

He glanced at the list of names Sark gave him, chilled by the importance of those men. For some there would be death as there had been for Dell. For himself—

He had forgotten to ask. But perhaps they would not have told him. Not at this time, anyway. The chemically treated food produced tumors in refractory, unresponsive cells. He had eaten Dell's vegetables, would eat more.

It was too late to ask and it didn't matter. He had important things to do. First would be the writing of his resignation to the officials of Camp Detrick.

As of tomorrow, he would be Dr. Curtis Johnson, truck farmer, specialist in atomic-age produce, luscious table gifts for the innocent and not-so-innocent human matches that would, if he and his unknown colleagues succeeded, be prevented from cremating the hopes of Mankind.

Louise would help him hang the new sign:

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT
Eat the Best
EAT JOHNSON'S
VEGETABLES

Only, of course, she wouldn't know why he had taken Dell's job, nor could he ever explain.

It would probably be the death of Curt Johnson, but that was cheap enough if humanity survived. —RAYMOND F. JONES

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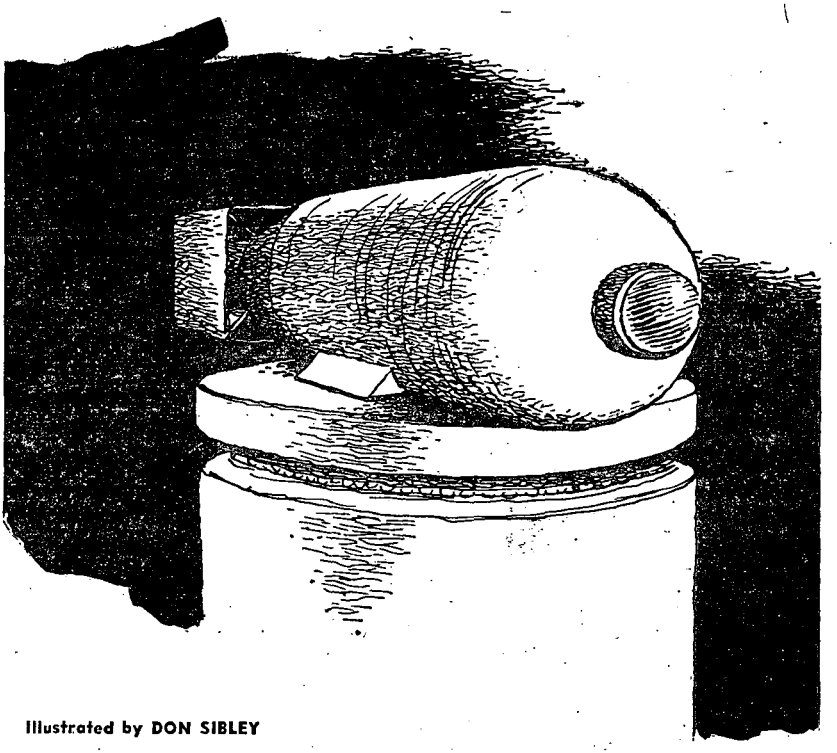

Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

Twenty-Foot Miss

By WILLY LEY

Artillery shells once had your number on them or they didn't. That was before Felix the Heat-Seeker & Co.

IT HAPPENED about six years ago in a research laboratory on the Atlantic Coast. Somebody of importance, a VIP in military parlance, had announced his visit. He arrived in time for lunch, and the engineers, talking in relays, used the opportunity to fill the VIP with technical lore. Among other things, he was told that they

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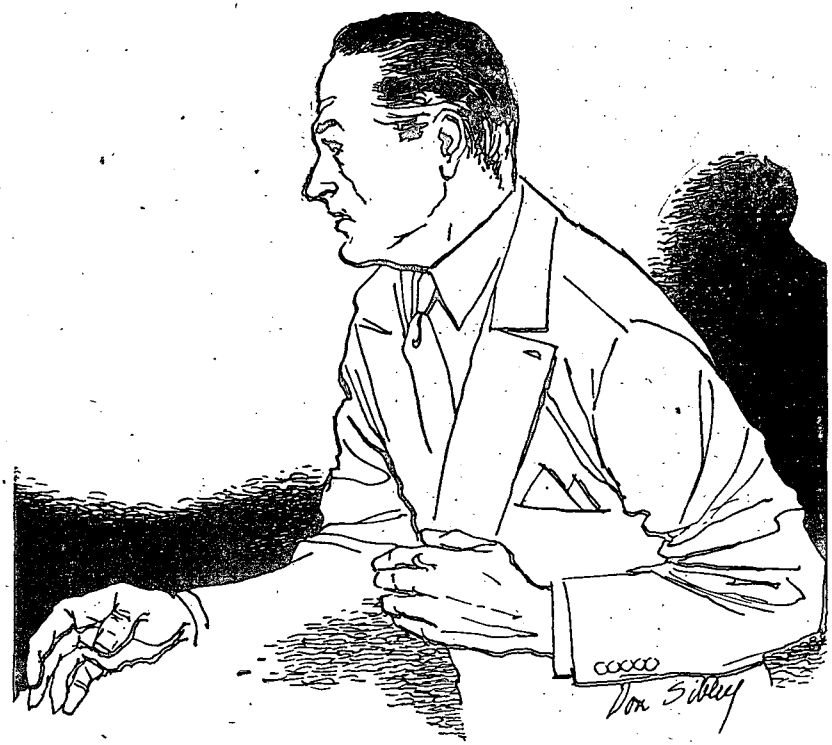

would show him "Felix the Heat-seeker." When the time came he was ushered into an empty room. In the center of that room there was a turntable and on the turntable rested a bomb, staring at the visitor through a lens in its nose. Feeling slightly uneasy, the VIP took a few steps to the right. The bomb swung around on the turntable, pointing at him again, staring. He moved to the left. The bomb turned after him, staring with the lens in its nose—

This was, after all, a perfectly natural thing, because Felix the Heat-seeker was reacting to the VIP's body temperature, which may have gone up a degree or two because of this performance. The somewhat nerve-racking demonstration was, in part, a device for being remembered in the budget. In addition to that it was a kind of summary of recent developments in military technology, a lecture with the theme that it is no longer true that "a miss of an inch

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is as good as a mile." The saying should now be that a twenty-foot miss is a clean hit.

That came about in three ways.

The first, simplest and also oldest is the exploding charge. If a solid cannonball missed a soldier by six inches, he could shrug and continue charging. If, later on, a 105mm. howitzer shell exploded at a distance of six feet from the soldier, it was a hit. The biggest application of this principle is, of course, the fission bomb, which, for this very reason, can't even be a front line weapon any more.

The second way of transforming a miss into a hit is essentially an addition to the exploding charge. It is what may be called the "sensing" fuze,* which will perceive the nearness of a target and respond at the precise fractional instant of closest approach.

The third, finally, is to correct the trajectory of whatever you are throwing at your enemy, *prior* to missing the target, so that the throw is turned into a hit. As far as strict chronological sequence goes, the third method was thought of and even tested before the second, but the second, the sensing fuze, was used first.

IT APPEARED in action during the early days of the Second World War, just when the war looked quite leisurely. The manifestation of the new principle in military technology was called a "magnetic mine," which is hardly a good name, for the device happened to be as non-magnetic as possible. Up to that moment all military engineers had known that a fuze (unless it happened to be a time fuze) had to make "contact" to be set off. That was still true, but it had always been taken for granted that any contact would be a physical one. That there could also be a contact of force fields was new.

The fuze of the so-called magnetic mine relied on the simple fact that the earth has a magnetic field. The best known manifestation of that field is that it makes a magnetic needle assume an approximate North-South position, as in a compass. But if there is a large mass of iron nearby—for example, a ship—the earth's magnetic field is disturbed for some distance and the compass needle misbehaves. Any schoolbook says so, but the Germans applied the information lethally.

They built a naval mine of non-magnetic materials, mostly aluminum, gave it the shape of an airplane bomb so that bombers could plant it, and put a fuze inside which would go off when a magnetic needle was disturbed. Such a disturbance meant that there was a large mass of iron nearby—again, for example, a ship. They

*The spelling FUZE is the one authorized by the Dept. of Defense. This is to distinguish it from a FUSE, which is an electric safety device.

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also had a safety catch on that fuze, consisting of a so-called hydrostatic switch, a device which prevented the fuze from working unless it was under water which opened the switch by its pressure.

It was the undoing of the scheme that one of these parachuted mines did not fall into water but landed on a mudbank. Commander J. G. D. Ouvry, R. N., approached the monster with a kit of non-magnetic tools, mainly bronze. He opened up the mine, giving a running account of his actions through a microphone so that, in case of accident, the next mine opener would know what had been done wrong. He was both skilful and lucky, since he happened to be protected by the faithful functioning of the hydrostatic switch. The Allies then knew how such a mine worked: it just sat in the bottom mud of shallow water, waiting for a ship to come close.

Once the principle of operation was known, counter-measures were not too difficult. Simultaneously the torpedo experts at Newport, R. I., began to think about disturbed force fields. Torpedoes, if they scored a hit, were very effective weapons. They were also very expensive weapons, which point was usually remembered when a torpedo made a near miss. The result of the thinking about near misses and disturbed force fields was that the torpedo was cross-bred with an advanced magnetic mine.

THE offspring was the Torpedo Mark XIV with magnetic fuze. It would explode when passing under a ship of shallow draft, and it would explode even when crossing the bow or stern. Performance was marred at first by a mistake in calibration of the early production models, and sailors made remarks featuring the word "long-hairs"—which they quickly took back when the device was made to work.

The most famous example of sensing fuzes operated above the water line. I mean what the military call the VT fuze. It means "variable time," though engineers are more likely to call it "proximity fuze." That fuze is something which is a bit hard to believe, not so much because of its action, which makes it go off in the proximity of a target, but because it is really a radio set.

You don't expect a radio set to be still in one piece, or even in working order, after it has been shot from a gun. But the VT fuze, after some 800 million dollars were spent on its development, remains in working order. In fact, it is *not* in working order before firing; it needs the shock of firing and the spinning of the shell to activate its battery.

The working principle may again be called that of a disturbed force field, but it is utilized somewhat differently. When the battery has been activated, the fuze sends

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out a steady radio signal that forms a kind of aura. As long as nothing enters the aura, nothing will happen. But when the shell comes close to an airplane, radio waves are reflected back to the fuze. A special tube in the fuze senses the reflection and builds up resentment in the form of a charge. When the charge has grown strong enough—all this taking place in fractions of a second—this tube sets off a detonator. The detonator explodes a booster charge and the shock of the exploding booster makes the TNT of the main charge go off. Which is the end of the VT fuze and its radio aura, but usually also the end of the obstacle in the aura.

These VT fuzes accomplished quite incredible feats during the Second World War. At Anzio Beach they downed 691 *Luftwaffe* planes, aided by a gun-directing mechanism known to ordnance personnel as the M-9. But the important point is *not* the large figure. It is that out of these 691 hits, some 680 were in all probability *near misses,* old style!

HOWEVER, there must have been an additional number of actual misses beyond the range of action of the VT fuze, for once a shell had left the gun muzzle, it was on its own. To influence it even *after* it had been fired was the goal of the third method.

The third method, that of guiding a lethal missile, cropped up for the first time in 1911. It was, of all places, in a circus in Berlin. They had a model of a Zeppelin airship there, about 15 feet long. When the time for the act came, a console was carried into the arena and the inventor closed one switch. The battery-powered electric motors of the airship model began to whir and the ship moved. A second switch was closed and the airship model flew in a curve. A third switch was closed; the airship dropped a small bomb, which exploded with red flames and much smoke in the sawdust.

Some time later, the same inventor demonstrated a motorboat which he ran by wireless signals from the shore of the lake. He pointed out that this would be a fine method for sending explosive-laden ships into enemy harbors or fleet formations. Probably because the range was very short and the signals could easily have been "jammed," these unmanned supertorpedoes failed to materialize during the First World War. After that war, however, the Germans utilized the idea in their famous *Zähringen*, a small warship with full armor but minus guns. Equipped with radio steering gear and all empty spaces stuffed with cork, the *Zähringen* did long service as a mobile target ship.

People who have read Goethe's *Faust* like to quote the lines: "All theory, my friend, is gray; but life

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a flowering green tree." It may be true in some cases, but when it comes to the guiding of missiles it works the other way round. It all looks fine and lush in theory. In real life performance, things begin to look dark. When Dr. Ralph E. Gibson of the Applied Physics Laboratory in Silver Springs, Md., was interviewed recently, one reporter asked how far one could fire a missile now. Doctor Gibson was willing to concede some 500 miles or a little more. And for what distance, asked another reporter, would you guarantee a hit? Ten feet, snapped Dr. Gibson. This I consider somewhat understated; he could have guaranteed a hit for the length of the missile itself.

FACT is, in the Second World War, the only guided missiles used operationally were those released from aircraft, where conditions are somewhat simpler. There were ground-to-ground missiles, like V-1 and V-2, but they were not guided. In the V-1, a robot pilot maintained the flying bomb on a straight course and at a given altitude. In the V-2, an automatic device saw to it that the power was shut off when the rocket had reached the proper velocity, which is, actually, the equivalent of doling out the right powder charge for a big gun.

Of true guiding there were only beginnings. As an example I might mention a large anti-aircraft rocket that was supposed to form part of the German Rhineland defense. Naturally, the rocket was named *Rheintochter* or Rhine Maiden. The idea was that when an allied bomber would be caught in a radar beam, a Rhine Maiden would be fired immediately and be trailed by a second beam, through which it would receive directional orders. Then the two beams would be brought together.

It did not work too well and most experts now believe that this was not due to wartime hurry, but that the system itself was at fault. Those who think so prefer the "one-beam system," in which the anti-aircraft missile is fed into the same beam that has caught the attacker. The missile receives no orders from the ground, but is equipped with a mechanism that will always shunt it back into its beam.

Doctor Gibson calls that "conscience guiding," the missile being unable to stray from the narrow path leading to the enemy. Using only one beam, this method is not merely simpler, it has another advantage. Since one can feed several missiles in succession into the beam, the enemy would not have won out by default just because a single missile's conscience slipped. All that would be needed for final success would be a radar man on the ground who did not lose his target.

But why not just send the missile aloft in the general direction of the enemy and entrust a device

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like Felix the Heat-seeker with the actual hunting? Well, during that demonstration the engineers had been careful to leave Felix alone with just one source of heat radiation. In real action there would be so many heat sources that any device would be confused. It would have to be brought pretty close to the intended prey until it could take over. And even then it might be useful only against an attacking unmanned missile. If it tried to chase a manned bomber, sniffing either for the heat of its exhaust or the noise of its engines, the crew could do something about it.

They could, for example, drop an instantaneously igniting incendiary bomb with a parachute that keeps it from falling too fast. The total weight of such a bomb would be around three pounds, small enough to allow any plane to carry a considerable number of them. Result: the heat-seeking interceptor would suddenly get a much hotter scent and strain all control surfaces in diving wildly after the floating magnesium bomb, blowing it successfully into smaller hot splinters. Any competent fireworks chemist can compound a mixture which does no harm but produces a considerable noise while burning. Incorporated into a parachute bomb, that would take care of noise-seeking missiles. One can confuse the radar man on the ground, too, but not that easily.

Going on from here, one could ask: why specific measures? Why not develop a field which will set off all VT-fuzed projectiles and missiles at a distance, where their explosion can't cause any harm?

PERSONALLY, I don't know if this can be done. I am mostly wondering whether a plane could carry the necessary equipment to do it. But even if it can be done and if the plane can carry the necessary equipment, there exists one kind of VT fuze that might spoil everything. It is the *optical* VT fuze which actually *sees* the plane.

The trick is accomplished by having a solid lucite lens which is covered except for a slot running all around the nose. Light enters through the slot and is focused on a photo-cell. An airplane that gets in the way is just something that acts as a partial screen reducing the amount of light received by the photo-cell. The photo-cell answers with a change in voltage that does what the reflected radio waves do in the other type.

If you now feel like the VIP who was left alone with Felix, you find yourself in large company. All these developments took place so fast that nobody has been able to think his way through. And if there should be a good partial answer, it is not likely to be published. But it looks as if attack and defense are better matched than they were in 1940. By hard work and ingenuity, things may be kept that way. —WILLY LEY

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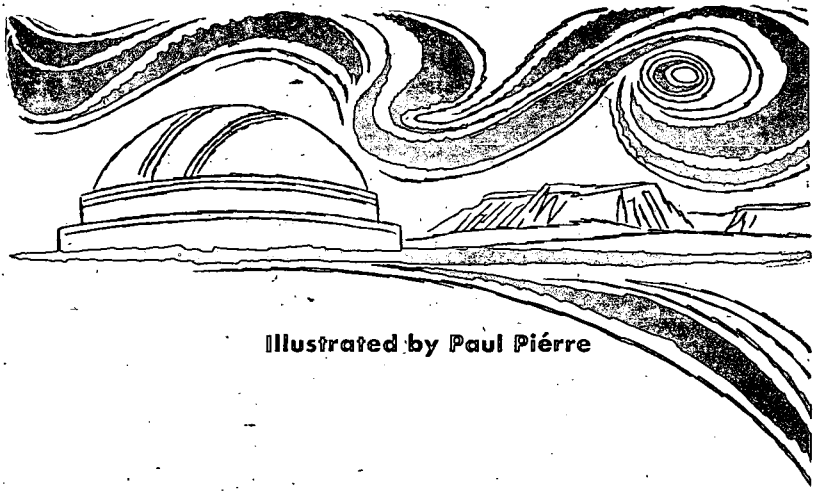

Illustrated by Paul Piérre

THE WAKER DREAMS

BY RICHARD MATHESON

There's nothing like exciting fantasy to escape boredom. The problem is to know whether it's actually a fantasy.

IF ONE flew over the city at this time of this day, which was like any other day in the year 3850, one would think all life had disappeared.

Sweeping over the rustless spires, one would search in vain for the sight of human activity. One's gaze would scan the great ribboned highways that swept over and under each other like the weave of some tremendous loom. But there would be no autocars to see; nothing but the empty lanes and the colored traffic lights clicking out their mindless progressions.

Dipping low and weaving in and out among the glittering towers, one might see the moving walks, the studied revolution of the giant street ventilators, hot in the winter and cool in summer, the tiny doors opening and closing, the park fountains shooting their methodical columns of water into the air.

Farther along, one would flit across the great open field on which the glossy spaceships stood lined before their hangars. Farther yet, one would catch sight of the river, the metal ships resting along shore, delicate froth streaming from their

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sterns caused by the never-ending operation of their vents.

Again, one would glide over the city proper, seeking some sign of life in the broad avenues, the network of streets, the painstaking pattern of dwellings in the living area, the metal fastness of the commercial section.

The search would be fruitless.

All movement below would be seen to be mechanical. And, knowing what city this was, one's eyes would stop the search for citizens and seek out those squat metal structures which stood a half mile apart. These circular buildings housed the never-resting machines, the humming geared servants of the city's people.

These were the machines that did all; cleared the air of impurities, moved the walks and opened the doors, sent their synchronized impulses into the traffic lights, operated the fountains and the spaceships, the river vessels and the ventilators.

These were the machines in whose flawless efficacy the people of the city placed their casual faith.

At the moment, these people were resting on their pneumatic couches in rooms. And the music that seeped from their wall speakers, the cool breezes that flowed from their wall ventilators, the very air they breathed—all these were of and from the machines, the unfailing, the trusted, the infallible machines.

Now there was a buzzing in ears. Now the city came alive.

THERE was a buzzing, buzzing. From the black swirl of slumber, you heard it. You wrinkled up your classic nose and twitched the twenty neural rods that led to the highways of your extremities.

The sound bore deeper, cut through swaths of snooze and poked an impatient finger in the throbbing matter of your brain. You twisted your head on the pillow and grimaced.

There was no cessation. With stupored hand, you reached out and picked up the receiver. One eye propped open by dint of will, you breathed a weary mutter into the mouthpiece.

"Captain Rackley!" The knifing voice put your teeth on edge.

"Yes," you said.

"You will report to your company headquarters immediately!"

That swept away sleep and annoyance as a petulant old man brushes chessmen from his board. Stomach muscles drew into play and you were sitting. Inside your noble chest, that throbbing meat ball, source of blood velocity, saw fit to swell and depress with marked emphasis. Your sweat glands engaged in proper activity, ready for action, danger, heroism.

"Is it . . .?" you started.

"Report immediately!" the voice crackled, and there was a severe click in your ear.

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You, Justin Rackley, dropped the receiver—plunko—in its cradle and leaped from bed in a shower of fluttering bedclothes.

You raced to your wardrobe door and flung it open. Plunging into the depths, you soon emerged with your skintight pants, the tunic for your forty-two chest. You donned said trousers and tunic, flopped upon a nearby seat and plunged your arches into black military boots.

AND your face reflected oh-so-grim thoughts. Combing out your thick blond hair, you were sure you knew what the emergency was.

The Rustons! They were at it again!

Awake now, you wrinkled your nose with conscious aplomb. The Rustons made revolting food for thought with their twelve legs, sign of alien progenitors, and their exudation of foul reptilian slime.

As you scurried from your room, leaped across the balustrade and down the stairs, you wondered once again where these awful Rustons had originated, what odious interbreeding produced their monster race. You wondered where they lived, where proliferated their grisly stock, held their meetings of war, began the upward slither to those great Earth fissures from which they massed in attack.

With nothing approaching answers to these endless questions, you ran out of the dwelling and flew down the steps to your faithful autocar. Sliding in, pushing buttons, levers, pedals, what have you, you soon had it darting through the streets toward the broad highway that led to headquarters.

At this time of day, naturally, there were very few people about. In point of fact you saw none. It was only a few minutes later, when you turned sharply and zoomed up the ramp to the highway, that you saw the other autocars whizzing toward the tower five miles distant. You guessed, and were correct in guessing, that they were fellow officers, all similarly ripped from slumber by mobilization.

Buildings flew past as you pushed pedals, deeper into their cavities, your face always grim, alive to danger, grand warrior! True, you were not averse to the chance for activity after a month of idleness. But the circumstances *were* slightly distasteful. To think of the Rustons made a fellow shudder, eh?

What made them pour from their unknown pits? Why did they seek to destroy the machines, let the acid canker of their ooze eat through metal, make the teeth fall off the gears like petals off a dying flower? What was their purpose? Did they mean to ruin the city? Govern its inhabitants? Or slaughter them? Ugly questions, questions without answers.

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Well, you thought as you drove into headquarters parking area, thank heaven the Rustons had only managed to get at a few of the outer machines, yours blessedly not included.

They, at least, had no more idea than you where the Great Machine was, that fabulous fountainhead of energy, driver of all machines.

You slid the seat of your military trousers across the seat of the autocar and jumped out into the wide lot. Your black boots clacked as you ran toward the entrance. Other officers were getting out of autocars, too, running across the area. None of them said anything; they all looked grim. Some of them nodded curtly at you as you all stood together in the rising elevator. Bad business, you thought.

With a tug at the groin, the door gave a hydraulic gasp and opened. You stepped out and padded silently down the hall to the high-ceilinged briefing room.

Already the room was almost filled. The young men, invariably handsome and muscular, stood in gregarious formations, discussing the Rustons in low voices. The gray soundproof walls sucked in their comments and returned dead air.

THE men gave you a look and a nod when you entered, then returned to their talking. Justin Rackley, captain, that's you, sat down in a front seat.

Then you looked up. The door to Upper Echelons was jerked open. The General came striding through, a sheaf of papers in his square fist. *His* face was grim too.

He stepped up on the rostrum and slapped the papers on the thick table which stood there. Then he plumped down on the edge of it and kicked his boot against one of its legs until all your fellow officers had broken up their groups and hurriedly taken seats. With silence creeping over all heads, he pursed his lips and banged a palm on the table surface.

"Gentlemen," he said with that voice which seemed to issue from an ancient tomb, "once more the city lies in grave danger."

He then paused and looked capable of handling all emergencies. You hoped that someday you might be General and look capable of handling all emergencies. No reason why not, you thought.

"I will not take up precious time," the General went on, taking up precious time. "You all know your positions, you all know your responsibilities. When this briefing is concluded, you will report to the arsenal and draw out your ray guns. Always remember that the Rustons must not be allowed to enter the machinery and live. Shoot to kill. The rays are *not* harmful, repeat, *not* harmful to the machinery."

He looked over you eager young men.

"You also know," he said, "the dangers of Ruston poisoning. For

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this reason, that the slightest touch of their stingers can lead to abysmal agonies of death, you will be assigned, as you also know, a nurse trained in the combating of systemic poisons. Therefore, after leaving the arsenal, you will report to the Preventive Section."

He winked, a thoroughly out-of-place wink.

"And remember," he said, with a broad roll of import in his voice, "this is *war!* And *only* war!"

This, of course, brought on appreciative smiles, a smattering of leers and many unmilitary asides. Upon which the General snapped out of his brief role as chuckling confrere and returned to strict autocratic detachment.

"Once assigned a nurse, those of you whose machines are more than fifteen miles from the city will report to the spaceport, there to be assigned a spacecar. All of you will then proceed with utmost dispatch. Questions?"

No questions.

"I need hardly remind you," completed the General, "of the importance of this defense. As you are well aware, should the Rustons penetrate our city, spread their ravaging to the core of our machine system, should they—heaven forfend!—locate the Great Machine, we may then expect nothing but the most merciless of butchery. The city would be undone, we would all be annihilated, Man would be overthrown."

THE men looked at him with clenched fists, patriotism lurching through their brains like drunken satyrs, yours included, Justin Rackley.

"That is all," said the General, waving his hand. "Good shooting."

He jumped down from the platform and swept through the doorway, the door opening magically a split second before his imperious nose stood to shatter on its surface.

You stood up, muscles tingling. Onward! Save our fair city!

You stepped through the broken ranks. The elevator again, standing shoulder to shoulder with your comrades, a fluttering sense of hyper-awareness coursing your healthy young body.

The arsenal room. Sound lost in the heavily padded interior. You, on line, grim-faced always, shuffling along, weapon bound. A counter; it was like an exchange market. You showed the man your identity card and he handed you a shiny ray gun and a shoulder case of extra ray pellets.

Then you passed through the door and scuffed down the rubberized steps to the Preventive Section. Corpuscles took a carnival ride through your veins.

You were fourth in line and she was fourth in line; that's how she was assigned to you.

You perused her contours, noting that her uniform, although similar to yours, somehow hung differently on her. This sidetracked

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martial contemplations for the nonce. *Zowie hoopla*—your libido clapped its calloused hands.

"Captain Rackley," said the man, "this is Miss Lieutenant Forbes. She is your only guarantee against death should you be stung by a Ruston. See that she remains close by at all times."

This seemed hardly an onerous commission and you saluted the man. You then exchanged a flicker of lids with the young lady and intoned a gruff command, relative to departure. This roused the two of you to walk to the elevator.

Riding down in silence, you cast glances at her. Long forgotten threnodies twitched into life in your revitalized brain. You were much taken by the dark ringlets that hung over her forehead and massed on her shoulders like curled black fingers. Her eyes, you noted, were brown and soft as eyes in a dream. And why shouldn't they be?

Yet something lacked. Some retardation kept bringing you down from ethereal cogitation. Could it, you wondered, be duty? And, remembering what you were out to do, you suddenly feared again. The pink clouds marched away in military formation.

Miss Lieutenant Forbes remained silent until the spacecar which you were assigned was flitting across the sky beyond the outskirts of the city. Then, following your somewhat banal overtures regarding the weather, she smiled her pretty little smile and showed her pretty little dimples.

"I am but sixteen," she announced.

"Then this is your first time."

"Yes," she replied, gazing afar. "I am very frightened."

You nodded, you patted her knee with what you meant to be a parental manner, but which, posthaste, brought the crimson of modesty flaming into her cheeks.

"Just stay close to me," you said, trying hard for a double meaning. "I'll take care of you."

Primitive, but good enough for sixteen. She blushed more deeply.

The city towers flashed beneath. Far off, like a minute button on the fringes of spiderweb, you saw your machine. You eased the wheel forward; the tiny ship dipped down and began a long glide toward Earth. You kept your eyes on the control board with strict attention, wondering about this strange sense of excitement running pell mell through your body, not knowing whether it presaged combat fatigue of one sort or another.

This was war. The city first. Hola!

THE ship floated down to and hovered over the machine as you threw on the air brakes. Slowly, it sank to the roof like a butterfly settling on a flower.

You threw off the switch, heart pounding, all forgotten but the

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present danger. Grabbing the ray gun, you jumped out and ran to the edge of the roof.

Your machine was beyond the perimeter of the city. There were fields about. Your keen eyes flashed over the ground.

There was no sign of the enemy.

You hurried back to the ship. She was still sitting inside watching you. You turned the knob and the communicator system spilled out its endless drones of information. You stood impatiently until the announcer spoke your machine number and said the Rustons were within a mile of it.

You heard her drawn-in breath and noted the upward cast of frightened eyes in your direction. You turned off the set.

"Come, we'll go inside," you said, holding the ray gun in a delightfully shaking hand. It was fun to be frightened. A fine sense of living dangerously. Wasn't that why you were here?

You helped her out. Her hand was cold. You squeezed it and gave her a half smile of confidence. Then, locking the door to the spacecar, to keep the foe out, you took her arm and the two of you went down the stairs. As you entered the main room, your head was at once filled with the smooth hum of machinery.

Here, at this juncture of the adventure, you put down your ray gun and ammunition and explained the machinery to her. It is to be noted that you had no particular concern for the machinery as you spoke, being more aware of her proximity. Such charm, such youth, crying out for comfort.

You soon held her hand again. Then you had your arm around her lithesome waist and she was close. Something other than military defense planned itself in your mind.

Came the moment when she flicked up her drowsy lids and looked you smack-dab in the eye, as is the archaic literary passage. You found her violet eyes somewhat unbalancing. You drew her closer. The perfume of her rosy breath tied casual knots in your limbs. And yet there was still something holding you back.

Swish! Slap!

She stiffened and cried out.

The Rustons were at the walls!

YOU raced for the table upon which your ray gun rested. On the couch next to the table was your ammunition. You slung the case over your shoulder. She ran up to you and, sternly, you handed her the preventive case. You felt like the self-assured General when he was in a grim mood.

"Keep the needles loaded and handy," you said. "I may . . ."

The sentence died as another great slobbering Ruston slapped against the wall. The sound of its huge suckers slurped on the outside. They were searching for the machinery in the basement.

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You checked the gun. It was ready.

"Stay here," you muttered. "I have to go down."

You didn't hear what she said. You dashed down the stairs and came bouncing out into the basement just as the first horror gushed over the edge of a window onto its metal floor like a stream of gravity-defying lava.

THE row of blinking yellow eyes turned on you; your flesh crawled. The great brown-gold monstrosity began to scuttle across toward the machines with an oily squish. You almost froze in fear.

Then instinct came to the fore. You raised the gun quickly. A crackling brilliantine blue ray leaped from the muzzle, touched the scaly body and enveloped it. Screeching and the smell of frying oil filled the air. When the ray had dissipated, the dead Ruston lay black and smoking on the floor, its slime running across the welded seams.

You heard the sound of suckers behind. You whirled, blasted the second of the Rustons into greasy oblivion. Still another slid over the window edge and started toward you. Another burst from the gun and another scorched hulk lay twitching on the metal.

You swallowed a great lump of excitement in your throat, your head snapping around, your body leaping from side to side. In a second, two more of them were moving toward you. Two bursts of ray; one missed. The second monster was almost upon you before you burst it into flaming chunks as it reared up to plunge its black stingers in your chest.

You turned quickly, cried out in horror.

One Ruston was just slipping down the stairs, another swishing toward you, the long stingers aimed at your heart. You pressed the button. A scream caught in your throat.

You were out of pellets!

You leaped to the side and the Ruston fell forward. You tore open the case and fumbled with the pellets. One fell and shattered uselessly on the metal. Your hands were ice, they shook terribly. The blood pounded through your veins, your hair stood on end. You felt scared and amused.

The Ruston lunged again as you slid the pellet into the ray gun. You dodged again—not enough! The end of one stinger slashed through your tunic, laid open your arm. You felt the burning poison shoot into your system.

You pressed the button and the monster disappeared in a cloud of unguent smoke. The basement machinery was secure against attack—the Rustons had bypassed it.

You leaped for the stairway. You had to save the machines, save her, save yourself!

Your boots banged up the metal

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chairs. You lunged into the great room of machines and swept a glance around.

A gasp tore open your mouth. She was collapsed on a couch, sprawled, inert. A Ruston line of slime ran down the front of her swelling tunic.

You whirled and, as you did, the Ruston vanished into the machinery, pushing its scaly body through the gear spaces. The slime dropped from its body and watery jaws. The machine stopped, started again, the racked wheels groaning.

THE city! You leaped to the machine's edge and shot a blast from the ray gun into it. The brilliantine blue ray licked out, missed the Ruston. You fired again. The Ruston moved too fast, hid behind the wheels. You ran around the machine, kept on firing.

You glanced at her. How long did the poison take? They never said. Already in your flesh, however, the burning had begun. You felt as if you were going up in flames, as if great pieces of your body were about to fall off.

You had to get an injection for yourself and her.

Still the Ruston eluded you. You had to stop and put another pellet in the gun. The interior began to whirl around you; you were overpoweringly dizzy. You pressed the button again and again. The ray darted into the machine.

You reeled around with a sob and tore open your collar. You could hardly breathe. The smell of the singed suet, of the rays, filled your head. You stumbled around the machine, shot out another ray at the fast-moving Ruston.

Then, finally, when you were about to keel over, you got a good target. You pressed the button, the Ruston was enveloped in flame, fell in molten bits beneath the machine, was swallowed up by the waste exhaust.

You dropped the ray gun and staggered over to her.

The hypodermics were on the table.

You tore open her tunic and jabbed a needle into her soft white shoulder, shudderingly injected the antidote into her veins. You stuck another into your own shoulder, felt the sudden coolness run through your flesh and your bloodstream.

You sank down beside her, breathing heavily and closing your eyes. The violence of activity had exhausted you. You felt as though you would have to rest a month after this. And, of course, you would.

She groaned. You opened your eyes and looked at her. Your heavy breathing began again, but this time you knew where the excitement was coming from. You kept looking at her. A warm heat lapped at your limbs, caressed your heart. Her eyes were on you.

"I . . ." you said.

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Then all holding back was ended, all doubt undone. The city, the Rustons, the machines—the danger was over and forgotten. She ran a caressing hand over your cheek.

"AND when next you opened your eyes," finished the doctor, "you were back in this room."

Rackley laughed, his head quivering on the pillow, his hands twitching in glee.

"But my dear doctor," he laughed, "how fantastically clever of you to know everything. How*ever* do you do it, naughty man?"

The doctor looked down at the tall handsome man who lay on the bed, still shaking with breathless laughter.

"You forget," he said, "I inject you. Quite natural that I should know what happens then."

"Oh, quite! Quite!" cried Justin Rackley. "Oh, it was utterly, utterly fantastic. Imagine me!" He ran strong fingers over the swelling biceps of his arm. "*Me,* a hero!"

He clapped his hands together and deep laughter rumbled in his chest, his white teeth flashed against the glowing tan of his face. The sheet slipped, revealing the broad suppleness of his chest, the tightly ridged stomach muscles.

"Oh, dear me," he sighed. "Dear me, what *would* this dull existence be without your blessed injections to ease our endless boredom?"

The doctor looked coldly at him, his strong white fingers tightening into a bloodless fist. The thought plunged a cruel knife into his brain —this is the end of our race, the sorry peak of Man's evolution. This is the final corruption.

Rackley yawned and stretched his arms. "I must rest." He peered up at the doctor. "It was such a *fatiguing* dream."

He began to giggle, his great blond head lolling on the pillow. His hands striking at the sheet as though he would die of amusement.

"Do tell me," he gasped, "what on earth have you in those utterly delightful injections? I've asked you so often."

The doctor picked up his plastic bag. "Merely a combination of chemicals designed to exacerbate the adrenals on one hand and, on the other, to inhibit the higher brain centers. In short," he finished, "a potpourri of intensification and reduction."

"Oh, you always say that," said Justin Rackley. "But it *is* delightful. Utterly, charmingly delightful. You will be back in a month for my next dream and my dream playback?"

The doctor blew out a weary gust of breath. "Yes," he said, making no effort to veil his disgust. "I'll be back next month."

"Thank heavens," said Rackley, "I'm done with that awful Ruston dream for another five months. Ugh! It's so frightfully vile! I like the pleasanter dreams about mining

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and transporting ores from Mars and the Moon, and the adventures in food centers. They're so much nicer. But . . ." His lips twitched. "*Do* have more of those pretty young girls in them."

His strong, weary body twisted in delight.

"Oh, *do*," he murmured, his eyes shutting.

He sighed and turned slowly and exhaustedly onto his broad, muscular side.

THE doctor walked through the deserted streets, his face tight with the old frustration. Why? Why? His mind kept repeating the word.

Why must we continue to sustain life in the cities? For what purpose? Why do we not let civilization in its last outpost die as it means to die? Why struggle to keep such men alive?

Hundreds, thousands of Justin Rackleys—well kept animals, mechanically bred and fed and massaged into fair and handsome form. Mechanically restrained, too, from physically turning into the fat white slugs that, mentally, they already were and would bodily resemble if left untended. Or die.

Why not let them? Why visit them every month, fill their veins with hypnotic drugs and sit back and watch them, one by one, go bursting into their dream worlds to escape boredom? Must he endlessly send his suggestions into their loosened brainways, fly them to planets and moons, crowd all forms of love and grand adventure into their mock-heroic dreams?

The doctor slumped tiredly and went into another dorm-building. More figures, strongly or beautifully made, passive on couches. More dream injections.

He made them, watched the figures stand and stumble to the wardrobes. Explorers' outfits this time, pith helmets and attractive shorts, snake boots and bared limbs. He stood at the window, saw them clamber into their autocars and drive away. He sat back and waited for them to return, knowing every move they would make, because he made them in his mind.

They would go out to the hydroponics tanks and fight off an invasion of Energy Eaters. Bigger than the Rustons and made of pure force, they threatened to suck the sustenance from the plants in the growing trays, the living, formless meat swelling immortally in the nutrient solutions. The Energy Eaters would be beaten off, of course. They always were.

Naturally. They were only dreams. Creatures of fantastic illusion, conjured in eager dreaming minds by chemical magic and dreary scientific incantation.

But what would all these Justin Rackleys say, these handsome and hopeless ruins of torpid flesh, if they found out how they were being fooled?

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Found out that the Rustons were only mental fictions for objectifying simple rust and wear and converting them into fanciful monsters. Monsters which alone could feebly arouse the dim instinct for self-preservation which just barely existed in this lost race. Energy Eaters—beetles and spores and exhausted growth solutions. Mine Borers—vaporous beasties that had to be blasted out of the Lunar and Martian metal deposits. And others, still others, all of them threats to that which runs and feeds and renews a city.

And what would they say, these Justin Rackleys, upon the discovery that each of them, in their "dreams," had done genuine manual work? That their ray guns were spray guns or grease guns or air hammers, their death rays no more than streams of lubrication for rusting machines or insecticides or liquid fertilizer?

What would they say if they found out how they were tricked into breeding with aphrodisiacs in the guise of anti-poison shots? How they, with no healthy interest in procreation, were drugged into the furtherance of their spineless strain, a strain whose only function was to sustain the life-giving machines.

IN A month he would return to Justin Rackley, *Captain* Justin Rackley. A month for rest, these people were so devoid of energy. It took a month to build up even enough strength to endure an injection of hypnotics, to oil a machine or tend a tray, and to bring forth one puny cell of life.

All for the machines, the city, for man . . .

The doctor spat on the immaculate floor of the room with the pneumatic couches.

The people were the machines, more than the machines themselves. A slave race, a detestable residue, hopeless, without hope.

Oh, how they would wail and swoon, he thought, getting grim pleasure in the notion, were they allowed to walk through that vast subterranean tunnel to the giant chamber where the Great Machine stood, that supposed source of all energy, and saw why they had to be tricked into working. The Great Machine had been designed to eliminate all human labor, tending the minor machines, the food plants, the mining.

But some wise one on the Control Council, centuries before, had had the wit to smash the Great Machine's mechanical brain. And now the Justin Rackleys would have to see, with their own unbelieving eyes, the rust, the rot, the giant twisted death of it. . . . But they wouldn't.

Their job was to dream of adventurous work, and work while dreaming.

For how long?

—RICHARD MATHESON

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TIME QUARRY

BY CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Conclusion of a 3-part serial

The war in time needed bigger battalions to decide victory—but those battalions all had to be composed of one man!

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

SYNOPSIS

In the 80th century, Man rules the galaxy, but even with the aid of billions of robots and androids—synthetic humans—his numbers are too small for more than a tenuous hold on all the stars and their planetary systems. All change, all danger of any sort, is a potential threat to the empire. One possible danger spot is 61 Cygni, unapproachable because a shield of force keeps Earth ships away.

Asher Sutton, agent of the Department of Galactic Investigation, is the only man who has ever landed on a Cygnian world. That was 20 years before the story opens. Now he returns to Earth . . . in a ship that cannot fly, with no food, air, or water aboard. His chief, Christopher Adams, is warned of Sutton's return by a man who claims to come from the future, and who advises Adams to have Sutton killed.

Sutton escapes assassination, but finds himself the center of a war in time, originating several centuries in his future, but spreading through all ages of human existence. The war is being fought over the interpretation of a book Sutton apparently will write at some future date, for on two occasions he discovers copies of his unwritten book on men who have come back to the past.

Sutton's book will state, when he writes it, that the inhabitants of 61 Cygni are symbiotic abstractions—

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not human, not even beings in our sense of the word. They form mutually beneficial partnerships with all individual life when it comes into existence, and stay with it until it dies. In truth, they are destiny, the unspoken voice that attempts to guide every living thing in a path which will help to attain the greatest possible fulfilment. The symbiotic abstractions attain a semblance of life in this relationship, while the unsuspecting host gains destiny. Sutton's premise is clear and unmistakable . . . all *forms of life have destiny, not just humanity.*

To inform the intelligent, thinking beings of the galaxy, Sutton was returned to life after his crash on 61 Cygni, twenty years before, given a secondary body that lives on pure energy, that can manipulate objects with mental energy, and kill by the force of hate alone, and he was sent back to Earth as ambassador.

But it is Sutton's premise that has caused the war in time. Prime opponents are the Revisionists, who want to interpret Sutton's book as meaning that only humans are beneficiaries of destiny. Against them are the androids, who are human in all respects but one . . . their inability to reproduce biologically.

In a girl named Eva Armour and an android named Herkimer, Sutton finds two friends. Another friend he could have counted on, Buster, his old family robot, has homesteaded a planet on the outer rim of the galaxy. Before going, Buster left a trunk for Sutton. Among the junk in the trunk, Sutton finds a queer wrench and an unopened letter, 6,000 years old.

Opening the letter, Sutton finds that it was written by a John H. Sutton, who tells of encountering a man who apparently had come in a ship from the future. After talking to the man, John H. returns a few hours later to the scene, but finds the ship and the man gone. On the grass lies a bloodstained wrench, apparently the very wrench which Sutton had found in the trunk. A few days later, the letter relates, a man comes to the Sutton farm looking for work. He stays there for ten years and at the time of the writing, John H. feels certain that he is the man from the future, somehow marooned in the 20th century. Fearful of ridicule if he told the story during his lifetime, John H. Sutton has left the letter to be opened after his death. Somehow it never was.

Because of the danger to Sutton on Earth, Herkimer and Eva Armour kidnap Sutton to an asteroid, where they plan that he will write his book. There, however, they find two men who turn out to be agents of the Revisionists. They offer Sutton any price he may ask if he will write the book so it will appear that only humans are the beneficiaries of destiny. When he refuses, they kill him.

Just as his human body is killed, however, he manages to switch to

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his second, alien body, which operates on pure energy. He destroys the two Revisionists and takes their time ship.

Determined to prevent the attempt of the human race to seize destiny as its own, Sutton decides to return to the 20th century, to the time and place where John H. Sutton had met the man from the future. There, in that incident of 6,000 years before, he feels certain, lies the key to the entire situation.

Returning, he witnesses from the edge of a woods the meeting between the man from the future and Sutton's remote ancestor. When John H. leaves, Sutton approaches the ship. The man from the future is holding a wrench and Sutton forces him to drop it. But in the ensuing fight, the man regains the wrench and strikes at Sutton's head. Even as the wrench descends upon his skull, Sutton realizes that not the man from the future, but he himself will be marooned in the 20th century.

CONCLUSION

XXXV

TRICKED!

Tricked by a smooth character from 500 years ahead in time.

Tricked by a letter from 6,000 years out of the past.

Tricked, groaned Sutton, by my own muddle-headedness.

He sat up and held his head in his hands and felt the westering Sun against his back, heard the squalling of a catbird in the blackberry patch and the sound of the wind as it ran along the corn rows.

Tricked and trapped, he said through his teeth.

He took his hands from his head and there in the trampled grass lay the wrench with the blood on it. Sutton spread out his fingers and blood was on them, too . . . warm and sticky blood. Gingerly he touched his head with a cautious hand and his hair was wet and matted down.

Pattern, he said viciously. It all runs in a pattern.

Here I am, and there is the wrench and just beyond the fence is the field of corn that is better than knee high on this splendid afternoon of July 4, 1977.

The ship from the future is gone and in another hour or so John H. Sutton will come waddling down the hill to ask the questions that he forgot to ask before. And ten years from now he will write a letter and in it he will record his suspicions about me and I will be in the farm yard at that very moment pumping a drink.

Sutton staggered to his feet and stood in the empty afternoon, with the sweep of sky above the horizon of the ridge and the panorama of the winding river far down the slope below.

He touched the wrench with his

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toe and thought: I could break the pattern. I could take the wrench and then John H. would never find it, and, with one thing in the pattern changed, the end might not be the same.

I read the letter wrong, he thought. I always figured it would be the other man, not me. It never once occurred to me that it was my blood upon the wrench and that I would be the one who would steal the clothes off the line.

And yet he realized there were certain things that didn't track. He still had his clothes and there would be no need to steal. His ship still was resting on the river's bottom and there was no need to stay in the past.

Yet it had happened once before, for if it had not happened, why had there been the letter? The letter had made him come here and the letter had been written because he had come, so he must have come before. And in that other time he'd stayed . . . and stayed only because he could not get away. This time he would go back; this time he need not stay.

A second chance, he thought. I've been given another chance.

Yet that wasn't right, for if there had been a second time, old John H. would have known about it. And there couldn't be a second time, for this was the very day that John H. had talked to the man out of the future.

Sutton shook his head.

There had been only one time that this had happened, and this, of course, was it.

Something will stop me, he told himself. Something will not let me go back. Somehow I will be forced to steal the clothes and in the end I'll walk to that farmhouse up there and ask if they need a hand for the harvest.

For the pattern was set. It *had* to be set.

Sutton touched the wrench with his toe again, pondering.

Then he turned and went down the hill. Glancing over his shoulder as he plunged into the woods, he saw old John H. coming down the hill.

XXXVI

FOR three days Sutton toiled to free the ship from the tons of sand that the treacherous, swift-running river currents had mounded over it. And he admitted, when three days were gone, that it was a hopeless task, for the current piled up the sand as fast as he could clear it.

After that, he concentrated on clearing an opening to the entrance lock and when another day went by with many cave-ins, he accomplished his purpose.

Wearily he braced himself against the metal of the ship.

A gamble, he told himself. But I will have to gamble.

For there was no possibility of

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wrenching the ship free by using the engines. The tubes, he knew, were packed with sand and any attempt to use the rockets would simply mean that he and the ship and a good portion of the landscape would evaporate in a flashing *puff* of atomic fury.

He had lifted a ship from a Cygnian planet and driven it across eleven years of space by the power of mind alone. He had rolled two sixes.

Perhaps, he told himself. Perhaps . . .

There were tons of sand and he was deathly tired, tired despite the smooth, efficient functioning of his non-human system of metabolism.

I rolled two sixes, he said. Surely that was harder than the task I must do now. Although that called for deftness and this will call for power . . . and suppose, just suppose I haven't got the strength.

For it would take strength to lift this buried mass of metal out of the mound of sand. Not the strength of muscles, but the strength of mind.

Of course, he told himself, if he could not lift the ship, he still could use the time-mover, shift the ship, lying where it was, forward 6,000 years. Although there were hazards he did not like to think about. For in shifting the ship through time, he would be exposing it to every threat and vagary of the river through the whole 6,000 years.

He put his hand up to his throat, feeling for the key chain that hung around his neck.

There was no chain!

Mind dulled by sudden terror, he stood frozen for a moment.

Pockets, he thought, but his hands fumbled with a dread certainty that there was no hope. For he never put the keys of the ship in his pockets . . . always on their chain around his neck where they would be safe.

He searched, feverishly at first, then with a grim, cold thoroughness.

His pockets held no keys.

The chain broke, he thought in frantic desperation. The chain broke and it fell inside my clothes. He patted himself, carefully, from head to foot, and it was not there. He took off his shirt, gently, cautiously, feeling for the missing keys. He tossed the shirt aside, and sitting down, pulled off his trousers, searching in their folds, turning them inside out.

There were no keys.

On hands and knees, he searched the sands of the river bed, fumbling in the dim light that filtered through the rushing water.

An hour later he gave up.

The shifting, water-driven sand already had closed the trench he had dug to the lock, and now there was no point of getting to the lock, for he could not open it when he got there.

His shirt and trousers had vanished with the current.

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Wearily, beaten, he turned toward the shore, forcing his way through the stubborn water. His head broke into open air and the first stars of evening were shining in the east.

On shore he sat down with his back against a tree. He took one breath and then another, willed the first heartbeat, then the second and a third . . . nursed the human metabolism back into action once again.

The river gurgled at him, deep laughter on its tongue. In the wooded valley a whippoorwill began its sadistic suggestion. Fireflies danced through the blackness of the bushes.

A mosquito stung him and he slapped at it savagely.

A place to sleep, he thought. A hay-loft in a barn, perhaps. And pilfered food from a farmer's garden to fill his empty belly. Then clothes.

At least he knew where he'd get the clothes.

XXXVII

SUNDAYS were lonely.

During the rest of the week there was work—physical labor—for a man to do, the endless, trudging round of work that is necessary to extract a living from the soil. Land to plow, crops to be put in and tended and finally harvested, wood to cut, fences to be built and mended, machines to be repaired—things that must be done with bone and muscle, with calloused hand and aching back and the hot Sun on one's neck or the whiplash of windy cold biting at one's bones.

For six days a farmer labored and the labor was a thing that dulled one to the aching emptiness of memory, and, at night, when work was done, sleep was swift and merciful. There were times when the work, not only for its sedative effect, but of its very self became a thing of interest and of satisfaction. The straight line of new-set fence posts became a minor triumph when one glanced back along their length. The harvest field with its dust upon one's shoes and its smell of Sun on golden straw and the clacking of the binder as it went its rounds became a full-breasted symbolism of plenty and contentment. And there were moments when the pink blush of apple blossoms shining through the silver rain of spring became a wild and pagan paean of the resurrection of the Earth from the frosts of winter.

For six days a man would labor and would not have time to think; on the seventh day he rested and braced himself for the loneliness and the thoughts of desperation that idleness would bring.

Not a loneliness for a people or a world or a way of life, for this world was kindlier and closer to Earth and life and safer—much

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safer—than the world one had left behind. But a nagging loneliness, an accusing loneliness that talked of a job that waited, a piece of work that now might wait forever, a task that must be done, but now never might be done.

At first there had been hope.

Surely, Sutton thought, they will look for me. Surely they will find a way to reach me.

The thought was a comfort that he hugged close against himself, a peace of mind that he could not bring himself to analyze too closely. For he realized, even as he coddled it, that it was unrealistic, that it might not survive too close a scrutiny, that it was fashioned of faith and of wishful thinking and that for all its wealth of comfort it might be a fragile bauble.

THE past cannot be changed, he argued with himself, not in its entirety. It can be altered—subtly. It can be twisted and it can be dented and it can be whittled down, but by and large it stands. And that is why I'm here and will have to stay until old John H. writes the letter to himself. For the past is in the letter—the letter brought me here and it will keep me here until it's finally written. Up to that point the pattern must necessarily hold, for up to that point in time the past, so far as I and my relation with it are concerned, is a known and a revealed past. But the moment the letter is written, it becomes an unknown past; it tends to the speculative and there is no known pattern. After the letter is written, so far as I'm concerned, anything can happen.

Although he admitted, even as he thought it, that his premise was fallacious. Known or not, revealed or unrevealed, the past would form a pattern. For the past had happened. He was living in a time that already had been set and molded.

Even in that thought there was a hope, however. Even in the unknownness of the past and the knowledge that what had happened was a thing that stood unchanged, there must be hope. For somewhere, somewhen he had written a book. The book existed and therefore had happened, although, of course, it had not happened yet. But he had seen two copies of the book and that meant that in some future age the book was a factor in the pattern of the past.

Sometime, said Sutton, they will find me. Sometime before it is too late.

They will hunt for me and find me. They will have to find me.

They? he asked himself, finally honest with himself.

Herkimer, an android.

Eva Armour, a woman.

They . . . two people.

But not those two alone. Surely not those two alone. Back of

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them, like a shadowy army, all the other androids and all the robots that Man had ever fashioned. And here and there a human who saw the rightness of the proposition that Man could not, by mere self-assertion, be a special being; understanding that it was to his greater glory to take his place among the other things of life, as a simple thing of life, as a form of life that could lead and teach and be a friend, rather than a power-hungry creature that conquered and ruled and stood as one apart.

They would look for him, of course, but where?

With all of time and all of space to search in, how would they know when and where to look?

THE robot at the information center, he remembered, could tell them that he had inquired about an ancient town called Bridgeport, Wisconsin. And that would tell them where. But no one could tell them when.

For no one knew about the letter . . . absolutely no one. He remembered how the dried and flaky mucilage had showered down across his hands in a white and aged powder when his thumb nail had cracked loose the flap of the envelope. No one, certainly, had seen the contents of that letter since the day it had been written until he, himself, had opened it.

He realized now that he should have gotten word to someone . . . word of where and when he was going and what he meant to do. But he had been so confident and it had seemed such a simple thing, such a splendid plan.

A splendid plan in the very directness of its action . . . to intercept the Revisionist, to knock him out and take his ship and go forward into time to take his place. It could have been arranged, of that he was certain. There would have been an android somewhere to help fashion his disguise. There would have been papers in the ship and androids from the future to brief him on the things that he would have had to know.

A splendid plan . . . except it hadn't worked.

I could have told the information robot, Sutton told himself. He certainly was one of us. He would have passed the word along.

He sat with his back against the tree and stared out across the river valley, hazy with the blue of the Indian summer. In the field below him the corn stood in brown and golden shocks, like a village of wigwams that clustered tight and warm against the sure knowledge of the winter's coming. To the west the bluffs of the Mississippi were a purple cloud that crouched close against the land. To the north the golden land swept up in low hill rising on low hill until it reached a misty point where,

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somewhere, land stopped and sky began, although one could not find the definite dividing point, no clear-cut pencil mark that held the two apart.

A field mouse came out of a corn shock and looked at Sutton for a moment with its beady eyes, then squeaked in sudden fright and whisked into the shock again, its tail looped above its back in frantic alarm.

Simple folk, thought Sutton. The little, simple, furry folk. They would be with me, too, if they could only know. The bluejay and the field mouse, the owl and hawk and squirrel. A brotherhood, he thought . . . the brotherhood of life.

HE HEARD the mouse rustling in the shock and he tried to imagine what life as a mouse might mean. Fear first of all, of course, the ever-present, quivering, overriding fear of other life, of owl and hawk, of mink and fox and skunk. And the fear of Man, he added. All things fear Man. Man has caused all things to fear him.

Then there would be hunger, or at least the dread and threat of hunger. And the urge to reproduce. There would be the urgency and the happiness of life, the thrill of swiftly moving feet and the sleek contentment of the well-filled belly and the sweetness of sleep . . . and what else? What else might fill a mouse's life?

He crouched in a place of safety and listened and knew that all was well. All was safe and there were food and shelter against the coming cold. For he knew about the cold, not so much from the experience of other winters as from an instinct handed down through many generations of shivering in the cold and dying of winter famine.

To his ears came the soft rustlings in the corn shock as others of his kind moved softly on their business. He smelled the sweetness of the Sun-cured grass that had been brought in to fashion nests for warm and easy sleeping. And he smelled, as well, the grains of corn and the succulent weed seeds that would keep their bellies full.

All is well, he thought. All is as it should be. But one must keep watch, one must never lower one's guard, for security is a thing that can be swept away in a single instant. And we are so soft . . . we are so soft and frail, and we make good eating. A paw-step in the dark can spell swift and sure disaster. A whir of wings is the song of death.

He closed his eyes and tucked his feet beneath him and wrapped his tail around him. . . .

Sutton sat with his back against the tree and suddenly, without knowing how or when he had become so, he was rigid with the knowledge of what had happened.

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He had closed his eyes and tucked his feet beneath him and wrapped his tail about him and he had known the simple fears and the artless, ambitionless contentment of another life . . . of a life that hid in a corn shock from the paw-steps and the wings, that slept in Sun-scented grass and felt a vague but vital happiness in the sure and fundamental knowledge of food and warmth and shelter.

HE HAD not felt it merely, or known it alone . . . he had *been* the little creature, he had been the mouse that the corn shock sheltered; and at the one and the same time he had been Asher Sutton, sitting with his back against a straight-trunked shellbark hickory tree, gazing out across the autumn-painted valley.

There were two of us, said Sutton. I, myself, and I, the mouse. There were two of us at once, each with his separate identity. The mouse, the real mouse, did not know it, for if he had known or guessed, I would have known as well, for I was as much the mouse as I was myself.

He sat quiet and still, not a muscle moving, wonder gnawing at him. Wonder and a fear, a fear of a dormant alienness that lay within his brain.

He had brought a ship from Cygni, he had returned from death, he had rolled a six.

Now this!

A man is born and he has a body and a mind that have many functions, some of them complex, and it takes him years to learn those functions, more years to master them. Months before one takes a toddling step, months more before one shapes a word, years before thought and logic become polished tools . . . and sometimes, said Sutton, sometimes they never do.

Even then there is a certain guidance, the guidance of experienced mentors . . . parents at first and teachers after that and the doctors and the churches and all the men of science and the people that one meets. All the people, all the contacts, all the forces that operate to shape one into a social being capable of using the talents that he holds for the good of himself and the society which guides him and holds him to its path.

Heritage, too, thought Sutton . . . the inbred knowledge and the will to do and think certain things in a certain way. The tradition of what other men have done and the precepts that have been fashioned from the wisdom of the ages.

The normal human has one body and one mind, and Lord knows, Sutton thought, that is enough for any man to get along with. But I, to all intent, have what amounts to a second body and perhaps even a second mind,

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but for that second body I have no mentors and I have no heritage. I do not know how to use it yet; I'm just taking my first toddling step. I am finding out, slowly, one by one, the things that I may do. Later on, if I live long enough, I may even learn to do them well.

But there are mistakes that one will make. A child will stumble when it walks at first, and its words, to begin with, are only the approximation of words, and it does not know enough not to burn its finger with matches it has lighted.

"Johnny," he said. "Johnny, talk to me."

"Yes, Ash?"

"Is there more, Johnny?"

"Wait and see," said Johnny. "I cannot tell you. You must wait and see."

XXXVIII

THE android investigator said: "We checked Bridgeport back to the year 2,000 and we are convinced nothing happened there. It was a small village and it lay off the main trunk of world happenings."

"It wouldn't have to be a big thing," Eva Armour told him. "It could have been a little thing. Just some slight clue. A word out of the context of the future, perhaps. A word that Sutton might have dropped in some unguarded moment and someone else picked up and used. Within a few years a word like that would become a part of the dialect of that community."

"We checked for the little things, miss," the investigator said. "We checked for any change, any hint that might point to Sutton having been in that community. We used approved methods and we covered the field. But we found nothing, absolutely nothing. The place is barren of any leads at all."

"He must have gone there," said Eva. "The robot at the information center talked to him. He asked about Bridgeport. It indicates that he had some interest in the place."

"But it didn't necessarily indicate that he was going there," Herkimer pointed out.

"He went some place," said Eva. "Where did he go?"

"We threw in as large a force of investigators as was possible without arousing suspicion, both locally and in the future," the investigator told them. "Our men practically fell over one another. We sent them out as book salesmen and scissor grinders and unemployed laborers looking for work. We canvassed every home for forty miles around, first at twenty-year intervals, then, when we found nothing, at ten, and finally at five. If there had been any word or any rumor, we would have run across it."

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"Back to the year 2,000, you say?" asked Herkimer. "Why not to 1999 or 1950 or even 1800?"

"We had to set an arbitrary date somewhere," the investigator told him.

"The Sutton family lived in that locality," said Eva. "I suppose you investigated them just a bit more closely."

"We had men working on the Sutton farm off and on," said the investigator. "As often as the family was in need of any help on the farm, one of our men showed up to get himself the job. When the family needed no help, we had men on other farms nearby. One of our men bought a tract of timber in that locality and spent ten years at woodcutting . . . he could have stretched it out much longer, but we were afraid someone would get suspicious.

"We did this from the year 2,000 up to 3150, when the last of the family moved from the area."

EVA looked at Herkimer. "The family has been checked all the way?" she asked.

Herkimer nodded. "Right to the day that Asher left for Cygni. There's nothing that would help us."

Eva said, "It seems so hopeless. He is somewhere. Something happened to him. The future, perhaps."

"That's what I was thinking," Herkimer told her. "The Revisionists may have intercepted him. They may be holding him."

"They couldn't hold him . . . not Asher Sutton," Eva said. "They couldn't hold him if he knew all his powers."

"But he doesn't know them," Herkimer reminded her. "And we couldn't tell him about them or draw them to his attention. He had to find them for himself. He had to be put under pressure and suddenly discover them by natural reaction. He couldn't be taught them; he had to evolve into them."

"We did so well," said Eva. "We seemed to be doing so well. We forced Morgan into ill-considered action by conditioning Benton into challenging Sutton, the one quick way to get rid of Asher when Adams failed to fall in with the plan to kill him. And that Benton incident put Asher on his guard without our having to tell him that he should be careful. And now," she said. "And now. . . ."

"The book was written," Herkimer told her.

"But it doesn't *have* to be," said Eva. "You and I may be no more than puppets in some probability world that will pinch out tomorrow."

"We'll cover all key points in the future," Herkimer promised her. "We'll redouble our espionage of the Revisionists, check back

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on every task force of the past. Maybe we'll learn something."

"It's the random factors," Eva said. "You can't be sure, ever. All of time and space for them to happen in. How can we know where to look or turn? Do we have to fight our way through every possible happening to get the thing we want?"

"You forget one factor," Herkimer said calmly.

"One factor?"

"Yes, Sutton himself. Sutton is somewhere and I have great faith in him. In him and his destiny. For, you see, he listens closely to his destiny and that will pay off in the end."

Eva walked to the window.

Ash, she thought. Ash, my love, you simply have to be all right. You must know what you're doing. You must come back to us and you must write the book and. . . .

Not for me alone, she thought. Not for me alone, for I, least of all of them, have a claim on you. But the galaxy has a claim on you, and maybe someday the universe. The little striving lives are waiting for your words and the hope and dignity they spell. And most of all the dignity. Dignity ahead of hope. The dignity of equality . . . the dignity of the knowledge that all life is on an equal basis . . . that life is all that matters . . . that life is the badge of a greater brotherhood than anything the mind of Man has ever spelled out in all its theorizing.

And I, she thought, have no right to think the way I do, to feel the way I do.

But I can't help it, Ash. I can't help but love you.

Someday, she thought, and knew it for a hopeless wish.

She stood straight and lonely and the tears moved slowly down her cheeks, and she did not raise her hand to brush them off.

Dreams, she thought. Broken dreams are bad enough. But the dream that has no hope . . . the dream that is doomed long before it's broken . . . that's the worst of all.

XXXIX

"YOU are a strange man, William Jones," John H. Sutton told him. "And a good one, too. I've never had a better hired hand in all the years I've farmed. None of the others would stay more than a year or two, always running off, always going somewhere."

"I have no place to go," said Asher Sutton. "There's no place I want to go. This is as good as any."

And it was better, he told himself, than he had thought it would be, for here were peace and security and living close to nature that no man of his own age ever had experienced.

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The two men leaned on the pasture bars and watched the twinkling of the house and auto lights from across the river. In the darkness on the slope below them, the cattle, turned out after milking, moved about with quiet, soft sounds, cropping a last few mouthfuls of grass before settling down to sleep. A breeze with a touch of coolness in it drifted up the slope and it was fine and soothing after a day of heat.

"We always get a cool night breeze," said old John H. "No matter how hot the day may be, we have easy sleeping."

He sighed. "I wonder sometimes," he said, "how well contented a man should let himself become. I wonder if it may not be a sign of—well, almost sinfulness. For Man is not by nature a contented animal. He is restless and unhappy and it's that same unhappiness that has driven him, like a lash across his back, to his great accomplishments."

"Contentedness," said Asher Sutton, "is an indication of complete adjustment to one's particular environment. It is a thing that is not often found . . . that is too seldom found. Someday Man, and other creatures as well, will know how to achieve it and there will be peace and happiness in all the galaxy."

John H. chuckled. "You take in a lot of territory, William."

"I was taking the long-range view," said Sutton. "Someday Man will be going to the stars."

John H. nodded. "Yes, I suppose he will. But he will go too soon. Before Man goes to the stars, he should learn how to live on Earth."

He yawned and said: "I think I will turn in. Getting old, you know, and I need my rest."

"I'm going to walk around a bit," said Sutton.

"You do a lot of walking, William."

"After dark," said Sutton, "the land is different than it is in daylight. It smells different. Sweet and fresh and clean, as if it were just washed. You hear things in the quietness you do not hear in daylight. You walk and you are alone with the land and the land belongs to you."

JOHN H. wagged his head. "It's not the land that's different, William. It is you. Sometimes I think you see and hear things that the rest of us do not know. Almost, William. . . ." he hesitated, then added abruptly, "almost as if you did not quite belong."

"Sometimes I think I don't."

"Remember this," John H. told him. "You are one of us . . . one of the family, seems like. Let me see, how many years now?"

"Ten," said Sutton.

"That's right. I can usually recall the day you came, but sometimes I forget. Sometimes it seems

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that you were always here. Sometimes I catch myself thinking you're a Sutton."

He hacked and cleared his throat, spitting in the dust. "I borrowed your typewriter the other day, William. I had a letter I had to write. It was an important letter and I wanted it done properly."

"It's all right," said Sutton. "I'm glad it was some use to you."

"Getting any writing done these days, William?"

"No," said Sutton, "I gave up. I couldn't do it. I lost my notes, you see. I had it all figured out and I had it down on paper, and I thought maybe I could remember it, but I found I couldn't. It's no use trying."

John H.'s voice was a soft, low sound in the darkness. "You in any kind of trouble, William?"

"No," said Sutton. "Not exactly trouble."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"Not a thing," said Sutton.

"Let me know if there is," insisted the old man. "We'd do anything for you."

"Someday I may go away," said Sutton. "Maybe suddenly. If I do, I wish you would forget me, forget I was ever here."

"That's what you wish, lad?"

"Yes, it is," said Sutton.

"We can't forget you, William. We never could do that. But we won't talk about you. If someone comes and asks about you, we'll act as if you never had been here."

He paused. "Is that the way you want it, William?"

"Yes," said Sutton. "If you don't mind, that's the way I want it."

They stood silent for a moment, facing one another in the dark. Then the old man turned around and clumped toward the lighted windows of the house and Sutton, turning, too, leaned his arms on the pasture bars and stared across the river where the faery lights were blinking in a land of never-never.

TEN years, thought Sutton, and the letter's written. Ten years and the conditions of the past are met. Now the past can get along without me, for I was only staying so that John H. could write the letter . . . so that he could write it and I could find it in an old trunk 6,000 years from now and read it on a nameless asteroid I won by killing a man in a place of synthetic dreams that will be called the Zag House.

The Zag House will be over there across the river, he thought, far up the plain above the ancient town of Prairie du Chien; and the University of North America, with its towers of beauty, will be set on the hills there to the north, and Adams' house will be near the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. Great ships will climb into the sky from the Iowa

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prairies and head out for the stars that even now are twinkling overhead . . . and other stars that no man's eye can see unaided.

Far across the river, he thought, that's where the Zag House will be. And that is where someday, 6,000 years from now, I will meet a little girl in a checkered apron. Like in a story, he thought. Boy meets girl and the boy is tow-headed with a cowlick and he's barefooted and the girl twists her apron in her little hands and tells him what her name is. . . .

He straightened and gripped the top bar of the pasture gate.

"Eva," he said hopelessly, "where are you?"

Her hair was copper and her eyes . . what color were her eyes? I have studied you for twenty years, she had said, and he had wanted to kiss her for it, not believing the words she spoke, but ready to believe the unspoken word of her proud face and lovely body.

Somewhere she still existed, somewhere in time and space. Somewhere she might be thinking of him as even now he thought of her. If he tried hard enough, he might contact her. Might drive his hunger for her through the folds of space and time and let her know that he still remembered, still wanted her, that somehow, sometime he would come back to her.

But even as he thought of it, he knew that it was unreal, that he floundered in the grasp of forgotten time as a man may flounder in a running sea. It was not he who would reach out for her, for he could not, but she or Herkimer or someone else might reach out to him . . . if anyone ever did.

Ten years, he thought, and they seem to have forgotten me. Is it because they cannot find me, or, having found me, cannot reach me? Or is it for a purpose, and if that is it, what can the purpose be?

There had been times when he had felt that he was being watched, that nasty touch of cold between the shoulder blades. And there had been the time when someone had run from him when he had been in the woods, late of a summer evening, hunting for the fence-jumping, cross-eyed heifer that was forever getting lost.

He turned from the pasture bars and through the barnyard, making his way in the darkness as a man will walk in a well-remembered room. From the barn came the scent of freshly mown hay, and in the row of chicken coops one of the young birds was cheeping sleepily.

EVEN as he walked, his mind flicked out and touched the disturbed chicken's mind.

Fluttering dread of an unknown thing . . . there had been a sound coming on the edge of sleep. And a sound was danger . . . a signal of

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an unknown danger. Sound and nowhere to go. Darkness and sound. Apprehension.

Sutton pulled back his mind and walked on. Not much stability in a chicken, he thought. A cow was contented and its thought and purpose as slow-moving as its feeding. A dog was alive and friendly; and a cat, no matter how well tamed it might be, still walked the jungle's edge.

I know them all, he thought. I have been each one of them. And there are some that are not quite pleasant. A rat, for example, or a weasel or a bass lying in wait beneath the lily pads. But the skunk . . . the skunk was a pleasant fellow. One could enjoy living as a skunk.

Curiosity or practice? Perhaps curiosity, he admitted, the human penchant for prying into things that were hung with signs: No Trespassing. Keep Out. Private. Do Not Disturb. But practice as well, learning one of the tools of the second body. Learning how to move into another mind and share its every shade of intellectual and emotional reactions.

But there was a line . . . a line he had never crossed, either through innate decency or a fear of being found out. He could not decide quite which.

The road was a dusty strip of white that ran along the ridge, twisting between the deep bowls of darkness where the land fell away into deep hollows. Sutton walked slowly, footfalls muffled by the dust. The land was black and the road was white and the stars were large and soft in the summer night. So different, Sutton thought, from the winter stars. In the winter the stars retreated high into the sky, and glowed with a hard and steely light.

Peace and quiet, he told himself. In this corner of the ancient Earth there is peace and quiet, unbroken by the turbulence of twentieth century living.

From a land like this came the steady men, the men who in a few more generations would ride the ships out to the stars. Here, in the quiet corners of the world, were built the stamina and courage, the depth of character and the deep convictions that would take the engines that more brilliant, less stable men had dreamed, and drive them to the farthest rims of the galaxy, there to hold key worlds for the glory and the profit of the race.

The profit, Sutton said. The glory gets dimmed by profit somehow.

Ten years, he thought, and the involuntary compact with time has been consummated . . . each condition filled. I am free to go.

But there was no place to go and no way to get there.

I would like to stay, said Sutton. It is pleasant here.

"Johnny," he said. "Johnny, what are we going to do?"

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HE FELT the stir in his mind, the old canine stir, the wagging tail, the comfort of blankets tucked about a child in his bed.

"It's all right, Ash," said Johnny. "Everything's all right. You needed these ten years."

"You've stayed with me, Johnny."

"I am you," said Johnny. "I came when you were born. I'll stay until you die."

"And then?"

"You'll not need me, Ash. I'll go to something or someone else. None walks alone."

None walks alone, said Sutton, and he said it like a prayer.

And he was not alone.

Someone walked beside him, and where he'd come from, and how long he'd been there, Sutton did not know.

"This is a splendid walk," said the man, whose face was hidden in darkness. "Do you take it often?"

"Almost every night," said Sutton's tongue, and his brain warned: Steady! Steady!

"It's so quiet," said the man. "So quiet and alone. It is good for thinking. A man could do a lot of thinking, walking nights out here."

Sutton did not answer.

They plodded along, side by side, and even while he fought to keep relaxed, Sutton felt his body tensing.

"You've been doing a lot of thinking, Sutton," said the man. "Ten whole years of thinking."

"You should know," said Sutton. "You've been watching me."

"We've watched," admitted the man. "And our machines have watched. We got you down on tape and we know a lot about you. A whole lot more than we did ten years ago."

"Ten years ago," said Sutton, "you sent two men to buy me off."

"I know," replied the man. "We have often wondered what became of them."

"That's an easy one," Sutton said. "I killed them."

"They had a proposition."

"If you can call it that. They offered me a planet."

"I knew at the time it wouldn't work," the man declared. "I told Trevor that it wouldn't work."

"I suppose you have another proposition?" Sutton asked. "A slightly higher price?"

"Not exactly," said the man. "We thought this time we'd cut out the bargaining and just let you name your price."

"I'll think about it," Sutton told him. "I'm not too sure I can think up a price."

"As you wish, Sutton," said the man. "We'll be waiting . . . and watching. Just give us the sign when you've made up your mind."

"A sign?"

"Sure. Just write us a note. We'll be looking over your shoulder. Or just say . . . 'Well, I've made up my mind.' We'll be listening and we'll hear."

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"Simple," Sutton replied. "Nothing to it."

"We make it easy for you," said the man. "Good evening, Mr. Sutton."

Sutton did not see him do it, but sensed that he had touched his hat . . . if he wore a hat. Then he was gone, turning off the road and going down across the pasture, walking in the dark, heading for the woods that sloped to the river bluffs.

SUTTON stood in the dusty road and listened to him go—the soft swish of dew-laden grass brushing on his shoes, the muted pad of his feet in the pasture.

Contact at last! After ten years, contact with the people from another time. But the wrong people. Not his people.

The Revisionists had been watching him, even as he had sensed them watching. Watching and waiting, waiting for ten years. But, of course, not ten years, of their time, just ten years of his. Machines and watchers would have been sprinkled through those ten years, so that the job could have been done in a year or a month, or even in a week, if they had wanted to throw enough men and materials into the effort.

But why wait ten years? To soften him up, to make him ready to jump at anything they offered?

To soften him up? He grinned wryly in the dark.

Then suddenly the picture came to him and he stood there stupidly, wondering why he hadn't thought of it much sooner.

They hadn't waited to soften him up . . . they had waited for old John H. to write the letter. For they knew about the letter. They had studied old John H. and they knew he'd write a letter. They had him down on tape and they knew him inside out and they had figured to an eyelash the way his mind would work.

The letter was the key to the whole thing. The letter was the lure that had been used to suck Asher Sutton back into this time. They had lured him, then sealed him off and kept him, kept him as surely as if they'd had him in a cage. They had studied him and they knew him and they had him figured out. They knew what he would do as surely as they had known what old John H. would do.

His mind flicked out and probed cautiously at the brain of the man striding down the hill.

Chickens and cats and dogs and meadow mice—and not one of them suspected, not one of them had known that another mind than theirs had occupied their brain.

But the brain of a man might be a different matter. Highly trained and sensitive, it might detect outside interference, might sense, if it did not actually know, the invasion of itself.

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The girl won't wait. I've been away too long. Her affections are less than skin deep and she has no morals, absolutely none, and I'm the one to know. I've been on this damn patrol too long. She will be tired of waiting . . . she was tired of waiting when I was gone three hours. To hell with her . . . I can get another one. But not like her . . . not exactly like her. There isn't another one anywhere quite like her.

Whoever said this Sutton guy would be an easy one to crack was crazy as a loon. God, after ten years in a dump like this, I'd fall on someone's neck and kiss 'em if they came back from my own time. Anyone at all . . . friend or foe, it would make no difference. But what does Sutton do? Not a damn word. Not a single syllable of surprise in any word he spoke. When I first spoke to him, he didn't even break his stride, kept right on walking as if he knew I'd been there all the time. Cripes, I could use a drink. Nerve-wracking work.

Wish I could forget that girl. Wish she would be waiting for me, but I know she won't. Wish . . .

SUTTON snapped back his mind, stood quietly in the road.

And inside himself he felt the shiver of triumph, the swift backwash of relief and triumph. They didn't know. In all their ten years of watching, they had seen no more than the superficial things. They had him down on tape, but they didn't know all that went on within his mind.

A human mind, perhaps. But not his mind. A human mind they might be able to strip as bare as a sickled field, might dissect it and analyze it and read the story in it. But his mind told them only what it wished to tell them, only enough so that there would be no suspicion that he was holding back. Ten years ago Adams' gang had tried to tap his mind and had not even dented it.

The Revisionists had watched ten years and they knew each motion that he made, many of the things that he had thought.

But they did not know that he could go to live within the mind of a mouse or a catfish or a man.

For if they had known, they would have set up certain safeguards, would have been on the alert against him.

And they weren't. No more alert than the mouse had been.

He glanced back the road to where the Sutton farmhouse stood upon the hill. For a moment he thought that he could see it, a darker mass against the darkness of the sky, but that, he knew, was no more than pure imagination. He knew it was there and he had formed a mental image.

One by one, he checked the items in his room. The books, the few scribbled papers, the razor.

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There was nothing there, he knew, that he could not leave behind. Not a thing that would arouse suspicion. Nothing that could be fastened on in some later day and turned into a weapon to be used against him.

He had been prepared against this day, knowing that some day it would come—that some day Herkimer or the Revisionists or an agent from the government would step from behind a tree and walk along beside him.

Knowing? Well, not exactly. Hoping. And ready for the hope.

Long years ago his futile attempt to write the book of destiny without his notes had gone up in smoke. All that remained was a heap of paper ash, mixed these many years with the soil. Bleached away by the rains, gone as chemical elements into a head of wheat or an ear of corn.

He was ready. Packed and ready. His mind had been packed and ready, he knew now, for these many years.

Softly he stepped off the road and went down across the pasture, following the man who walked toward the river bluffs. His mind flicked out and tracked him through the darkness, using his thoughts to track him as a hound would use his nose to track a fox.

HE OVERHAULED him scant minutes after he had entered the fringe of trees and after that kept a few paces behind him, walking carefully to guard against the suddenly snapping twig, the swish of swaying bushes that could have warned his quarry.

The ship lay within a deep ravine and at a hail it lighted up and a port swung open. Another man stood in the port and stared into the night.

"That you, Gus?" he called.

The other swore at him. "Who else do you think would be floundering around in these woods at the dead of night?"

"I got to worrying," said the man in the port. "You were gone longer than I thought you would be. Just getting ready to set out and hunt for you."

"You're always worrying," Gus growled at him. "Between you and this outlandish ancient world, I'm fed up. Trevor can find someone else to do this kind of work from here on out."

He scrambled up the steps into the ship. "Get going," he told the other man tersely. "We're getting out of here."

He turned to shut the port, but Sutton already had it closed.

Gus took two steps backward, brought up against an anchored chair and stood there, grinning.

"Look at what we got," he said. "Hey, Pinky, look at what followed me back home."

Sutton smiled at them grimly. "If you gentlemen have no objection, I'll hitch a ride with you."

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"And if we have objections?" Pinky asked.

"I'm riding this ship," Sutton told him. "With you or without you. Take your choice."

"This is Sutton," Gus told Pinky. "*The* Mr. Sutton. Trevor will be glad to see you, Sutton."

Trevor . . . Trevor. That was three times he had heard the name, and somewhere else he had heard it once before. He stood with his back against the closed port and his mind returned to another ship and another two men.

"Trevor," Case had said, or had it been Pringle who had said it? "Trevor? Why, Trevor is the head of the corporation."

"I've been looking forward, all these years," Sutton told them, "to meeting Mr. Trevor. He and I will have a lot to talk about."

"Get her going, Pinky," Gus said. "And send ahead a message. Trevor will want to break out the guard of honor for us. We're bringing Asher Sutton back."

XL

TREVOR picked up a paper clip and flipped it at an ink well on the desk. The clip landed in the ink.

"Getting pretty good," said Trevor. "Hit it seven times out of every ten. Used to be I missed it seven times out of every ten."

He looked at Sutton, studying him.

"You look like an ordinary man," he said. "I should be able to talk with you and make you understand."

"I haven't any horns," said Sutton, "if that is what you mean."

"Nor," said Trevor, "any halo, either, so far as I'm concerned."

He flipped another paper clip and it missed the ink well.

"Seven out of ten," said Trevor.

He flipped another one.

"Sutton," said Trevor, "you know a great deal about destiny. Have you ever thought of it in terms of manifest destiny?"

Sutton shrugged. "You're using an antiquated term. Pure and simple propaganda of the nineteenth century. There was a certain nation that wore that one threadbare."

"Propaganda?" Trevor repeated. "Let's call it psychology. You say a thing so often and so well that after a time everyone believes it. Even, finally, yourself."

"This manifest destiny," said Sutton. "For the human race, I presume?"

"Naturally," said Trevor. "After all, we're the animals that would know how to use it to the best advantage."

"You pass up a point," declared Sutton. "The humans don't need it. They already think they are great and right and holy. Certainly you don't need to propagandize them."

"In the short view, you are right," agreed Trevor. "But in the

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short view only." He stabbed a sudden finger at Sutton. "Once we have the galaxy in hand, what do we do then?"

"Why," said Sutton and stopped. "Why, I suppose . . ."

"That's exactly it," said Trevor. "You don't know where you're going. Nor does the human race."

"And manifest destiny?" asked Sutton. "If we had manifest destiny, it would be different?"

Trevor's words were scarcely more than a whisper. "There are other galaxies, Sutton. Greater even than this one. Many other galaxies."

Good Lord! thought Sutton.

He started to speak and then closed his mouth and sat stiffly in his chair.

Trevor's whisper speared at him from across the desk.

"Staggers you, doesn't it?" he demanded.

Sutton tried to speak aloud, but his voice came out a whisper, too.

"You're mad, Trevor. Absolutely mad."

"The long-range view," said Trevor. "That is what we need. The absolutely unshakable belief in human destiny, the positive and all-inclusive conviction that Man is meant not only to take over this galaxy alone, but all the galaxies, the entire universe."

"YOU should live long enough," said Sutton, sudden mockery rising to his tongue.

"I won't see it, of course," admitted Trevor. "And neither will you. Nor will our children's children or their children for many generations."

"It will take a million years," Sutton told him.

"More than a million years," Trevor answered calmly. "You have no idea, no conception of the scope of the universe. In a million years we'll just be getting a good start. . . ."

"Then, why, for the love of heaven, do you and I sit here and quibble about it?"

"Logic," said Trevor.

"There is no real logic," Sutton declared, "in planning a million years ahead. A man can plan his own lifetime, if he wishes, and there is some logic in that. Or the life of his children and there still would be some logic in it. . . . and maybe in the life of his grandchildren. But beyond that there can be no logic."

"Sutton," asked Trevor, "did you ever hear of a corporation?"

"Why, yes, of course, but . . ."

"A corporation could plan for a million years," said Trevor. "It could plan very logically."

"A corporation is not a man," said Sutton. "It is not an entity."

"But it is," insisted Trevor. "An entity composed of men and created by men to carry out their wishes. It is a living, operative concept that is handed down from one generation to another to carry out a plan

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too vast to be accomplished in the lifetime of one man alone."

"Your corporation publishes books, too, doesn't it?" asked Sutton.

Trevor stared at him. "Who told you that?" he snapped.

"A couple of men by the name of Case and Pringle. They tried to buy my book for your corporation."

"Case and Pringle are out on a mission," Trevor said. "I had expected them back . . ."

"They won't be coming back."

"You killed them," Trevor said, flatly.

"They tried to kill me first. I'm awfully hard to kill."

"That would have been against my orders, Sutton. I do not want you killed."

"They were on their own," said Sutton. "They were going to sell my carcass to Morgan."

There was no way of telling, Sutton thought, how you hit this man. There was no difference of expression in his eyes, no faintest flicker of change across his face.

"I appreciate your killing them," said Trevor. "It saves me the bother."

He flicked a clip at the ink well and it was a hit.

"It's logical," he continued, as though Sutton had not spoken, "that a corporation should plan a million years ahead. It provides a framework within which a certain project may be carried forward without interruption, although the personnel in charge should change from time to time."

"Wait a minute," Sutton told him. "Is there a corporation or are you just posing fables?"

"THERE is a corporation," Trevor told him, "and I am the man who heads it. Varied interests pooling their resources . . . and there will be more and more of them as time goes on. As soon as we can show something tangible."

"By tangible, you mean destiny for the human race, for the human race alone?"

Trevor nodded. "Then we'll have something to talk about. A commodity to sell. Something to back up our sales talk."

Sutton shook his head. "I can't see what you expect to gain."

"Three things," Trevor told him. "Wealth and power and knowledge. The wealth and power and knowledge of the universe. For Man alone, you understand. For a single race. For people like you and me. And of the three items, knowledge perhaps would be the greatest prize of all, for knowledge, added to and compounded, correlated and coordinated, would lead to even greater wealth and power . . . . and to greater knowledge."

"It is madness," said Sutton. "You and I, Trevor, will be drifting dust, and not only ourselves,

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but the very era in which we live out this moment will be forgotten before the job is done."

"Remember the corporation."

"I'm remembering the corporation," Sutton said, "but I can't help but think in terms of people. You and I and the other people like us."

"Let's think in terms of people, then," said Trevor, smoothly. "One day the life that runs in you will run in the brain and blood and muscle of a man who shall be part owner of the universe. There will be trillions upon trillions of life-forms to serve him, there will be wealth that he cannot count, there will be knowledge of which you and I cannot even dream."

Sutton sat quietly, taut in his chair.

"You're the only man," said Trevor, "who is standing in the way. You're the man who is blocking the project for a million years."

"You need destiny," said Sutton, "and destiny is not mine to give away."

"You are a human being, Sutton," Trevor told him, talking evenly. "You are a man. It is the people of your own race that I'm talking to you about."

"Destiny," said Sutton, "belongs to everything that lives. Not to Man alone, but to every form of life."

"It needn't," Trevor contradicted. "You are the only man who knows. You are the man who can tell the facts. You can make it a manifest destiny for the human race instead of a personal destiny for every crawling, cackling, sniveling thing that has the gift of life."

Sutton didn't answer.

"One word from you," said Trevor, "and the thing is done."

"It can't be done," said Sutton. "This scheme of yours—think of the sheer time, the thousands of years, even at the rate of speed of the star-ships of today, to cross intergalactic space. Only from this galaxy to the next . . . not from this to the outermost galaxy."

TREVOR sighed. "You forget what I said about the compounding of knowledge. Two and two won't make four, my friend. It will make much more than four. In some instances thousands of times more than four."

Sutton shook his head, wearily.

But Trevor was right, he knew. Knowledge and technique would pyramid exactly as he said. Even, once Man had the time to do it, the knowledge in a single galaxy alone . . .

"One word from you," said Trevor, "and the war is at an end. One word and the security of the human race is guaranteed forever. For all the race will need is the knowledge that you can give it."

"It wouldn't be the truth."

"That," replied Trevor, "doesn't have a thing to do with it."

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"You don't need manifest destiny," said Sutton, "to carry out your project."

"We have to have the human race behind us. We have to have something that is big enough to capture their imagination. Something important enough to make them pay attention. And manifest destiny—manifest destiny as it applies to the universe—is the thing to turn the trick."

"Thirty years ago," said Sutton, "I might have thrown in with you."

"And now?" asked Trevor.

Sutton shook his head. "Not now. I know more than I did thirty years ago. Thirty years ago I was a human, Trevor. I'm not too sure I'm entirely human any longer."

"I hadn't mentioned the matter of reward," said Trevor. "That goes without saying."

"No, thanks," said Sutton. "I'd like to keep on living."

Trevor flipped a clip at the ink well and it missed.

"You're slipping," Sutton said. "Your percentage is way off."

Trevor picked up another clip.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead and have your fun. There's a war on and we'll win that war. It's a hellish way to fight, but we're doing it the best we can. No war anywhere, no surface indication of war, for you understand the galaxy is in utter and absolute peace under the rule of benevolent Earthmen. We can win without you, Sutton, but it would be easier with you."

"You're going to turn me loose?" Sutton asked.

"Why, sure," Trevor told him. "Go on out and beat your head against a stone wall a little longer. In the end, you'll get tired of it. Eventually you'll give up out of sheer exhaustion. You'll come back then and give us the thing we want."

Sutton rose to his feet.

He stood for a moment, indecisive.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Trevor.

"One thing has me puzzled," Sutton answered. "The book, somehow, somewhere, already has been written. It has been a fact for almost five hundred years. How are you going to change that? If I write it now the way you want it written, it will change the human setup . . ."

Trevor laughed. "We got that one all figured out. Let us say that finally, after all of these years, the original of your manuscript is discovered. It can be readily and indisputably identified by certain characteristics which you will very carefully incorporate into it when you write it. It will be found and proclaimed, and what is more, proven . . . and the human race will have its destiny.

"We'll explain the past unpleasantness by very convincing histori-

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cal evidence of earlier tampering with the manuscript. Even your friends, the androids, will have to believe what we say, once we get through with it."

"Clever," Sutton admitted.

"I think so, too," said Trevor.

"Too bad you won't have a chance to try it," Sutton said.

XLI

AT THE building's entrance a man was waiting for him. He raised his hand in what might have been a brief salute.

"Just a minute, Mr. Sutton."

"Yes, what is it?"

"There'll be a few of us following you, sir. Orders, you know."

"But. . . ."

"Nothing personal, sir. We won't interfere with anything you want to do. Just guarding you, sir."

"Guarding me?"

"Certainly, sir. Morgan's crowd, you know. Can't let them kill you off."

"You can't know," Sutton told him, "how deeply I appreciate your interest."

"It's nothing, sir," the man told him. "Just part of the day's work. Glad to do it. Don't mention it at all."

He stepped back again and Sutton wheeled and walked down the steps and followed the cinder walk that flanked the avenue.

The Sun was near to setting. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw the tall, straight lines of the gigantic office building in which he had talked to Trevor outlined against the brightness of the western sky. But of anyone who might be following him he did not see a sign.

He had no place to go. He had no idea where to go. But he realized that he couldn't stand around feeling lost. He'd walk, he told himself, and think, and wait for whatever was going to happen next to happen.

He met other walkers and a few of them stared at him curiously and now, for the first time, Sutton realized that he still wore the clothing of a twentieth-century farm hand . . . blue denim overalls and cotton shirt, with heavy, serviceable farm shoes on his feet.

But here, he knew, even such an outlandish costume would not arouse undue suspicion. For on Earth, with its visiting dignitaries from far solar systems, with its Babel of races employed in the different governmental departments, with its exchange students, its diplomats and legislators representing backwoods planets, how a man dressed would arouse but slight curiosity.

By morning, he told himself, he'd have to find some hiding place, some retreat where he could relax and figure out some of the angles in this world of five hundred years ahead.

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Either that or locate an android he could trust to put him in touch with the android organization . . . for although he had never been told so, he had no doubt there was an android organization. There would have to be to fight a war in time.

HE TURNED off the path that flanked the roadway and took another one, a faint footpath that led out across marshy land toward a range of low hills.

Suddenly now he realized that he was hungry and that he should have dropped into one of the shops in the office building for a bite of food. And then he remembered that he had no money with which to pay for food. A few twentieth-century dollars were in his pockets, but they would be worthless here as a medium of exchange, although quite possibly they might be collectors' items.

Short hours ago, he thought, he had walked a dusty hilltop road in the twentieth century, scuffing the white dust with his shoes . . . and some of the white dust, he saw, still clung to the leather. Even as the memory of that hilltop road still clung to his memory. Memory and dust, he thought, link us to the past.

He reached the hills and began to climb them and the night was sweet with the smell of pine.

He came to the top of a slight rise and stood there for a moment, looking out across the velvety softness of the night. Somewhere, near at hand, a cricket was tentatively tuning up his fiddle, and from the marsh came the muted sound of frogs. In the darkness just ahead of him, a stream was splashing along its rocky bed and it talked as it went along, talked to the trees and its grassy banks and the nodding flowers above them.

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"I would like to stop," it said. "I would like to stop and talk with you. But I can't, you see. I must hurry on. I have some place I must go. I can't waste a minute. I must hurry on."

Like Man, thought Sutton. For Man is driven like the stream. Man is driven by circumstance and necessity and the bright-eyed ambition of other restless men who will not let them be.

He did not hear a sound, but he felt the great hand close upon his arm and yank him off the path. Twisting, he sought to free himself of the grasp, and saw the dark blur of the man who had grabbed him. He balled his fist and swung it and it was a sledge-hammer slamming at the dark head, but it never reached its mark. A charging body slammed into his knees and drove them inward under him. Arms wrapped themselves around his legs and he staggered, falling on his face.

He sat up and somewhere off to the right he heard the soft snickering of rapidly firing guns and caught, out of the tail of his eyes, their bright flicker in the night.

Then a hand came out of nowhere and cupped itself around his mouth and nose.

"Sleeping powder!" he thought. "Must hold my breath . . ."

And even as he thought it, the dark figures in the woods, the cheeping frogs and the snarling of the guns fused into silence.

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XLII

SUTTON opened his eyes to strangeness and lay quietly on the bed. A breeze came through an open window and the room, decorated with fantastic life-murals, was splashed with brilliant sunlight. The breeze brought in the scent of blooming flowers and in a tree outside a bird was chirping contentedly.

Slowly Sutton let his senses reach out and gather in the facts of the room, the facts of strangeness . . . the unfamiliar furniture, the contour of the room itself, the green and purple monkeys that chased one another along the wavy vine that ran around the border of the walls.

Quietly his mind moved back along the track of time to his final conscious moment. There had been guns flickering in the night and there had been a hand that reached out and cupped his nose.

Drugged, Sutton told himself. Drugged and dragged away.

Before that there had been a cricket and the frogs singing in the marsh and the talking brook that babbled down the hill, hurrying to get wherever it was going.

And before that a man had sat across a desk from him and told him about a corporation and a dream and a plan the corporation held.

Fantastic, Sutton thought. And in the bright light of the room, the very idea was one of utter fantasy . . . that Man should go out, not only to the stars, but to the other galaxies, and plan a million years ahead.

But there was greatness in it, a very human greatness. There had been a time when it had been fantasy to think that Man could ever lift himself from the bosom of the planet of his birth. And another time when it had been fantasy to think that Man would go beyond the solar system, out into the dread reaches of nothingness that stretched between the stars. And through time itself. . . .

But there had been strength in Trevor, and conviction as well as strength. A man who knew where he was going and why he was going and what it took to get there.

Manifest destiny, Trevor had said. That is what it takes. That is what it needs.

Man would be almost a god. The concepts of life and thought that had been born on the Earth would be the basic concepts of the entire universe, of the fragile bubble of space and time that bobbed along on a sea of mystery beyond which no mind could penetrate. And yet, by the time that Man got where he was headed for, he might well be able to penetrate that, too.

A MIRROR stood in one corner of the room and in it he saw the reflection of the lower

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half of his body, lying on the bed, naked except for a pair of shorts. He wiggled his toes and watched them in the glass.

And you're the only one who is stopping us, Trevor had told him. You're the one man standing in the way of Man. You're the stumbling block. You are keeping men from being gods.

But all men did not think as Trevor did. All men were not tangled in the blind chauvinism of the human race.

Always there are men who know that humanity is a single race, men who refuse to exploit other forms of life. Teachers. Missionaries. Vegetarians. Ordinary feeling human beings.

Even in his time, there had been men who treated androids sympathetically and Sutton had been one of them, though he knew now that it was the sympathy of the master for the underdog. The androids had not misunderstood; they knew it wasn't equality that was offered or would be granted, that sympathy could turn to savage reprisal if they acted as equals. Occasionally one would, swaggering and belligerent in the way of the frightened and insecure, and his ghastly fate served as example to others who might, as the saying went, get out of hand.

For the human race, thought Sutton, cannot even for a moment forget that it is human, cannot achieve the greatness of humility that will unquestioningly accord equality. Even while the humane argue for the equality of androids, they cannot help but patronize the very ones that they would make equal.

What was it Herkimer had said? Equality not by edict, not by human tolerance. But that was the only way the human race would ever accord equality . . . by edict, by dispensation, a gesture of tolerance where there was none, actually.

AND yet, thought Sutton, there is Eva Armour.

There may be others like her. Somewhere, working with the androids even now, there may be others like her.

He swung his feet out of bed and sat on the bed's edge. A pair of slippers stood on the floor and he worked his feet into them, stood up and walked to the mirror.

A strange face stared back at him, a face he'd never seen before, and for a moment muddy panic surged within his brain.

Then, sudden suspicion blossoming, his hand went up to his forehead and rubbed at the smudge that was there, set obliquely across his brow.

Bending low, with his face close to the mirror, he verified the thought.

The smudge upon his brow was an android identification mark! An identification key and number!

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WITH his fingers he carefully explored his face, located the plastic coatings of flesh that had changed its contours until he was unrecognizable.

He turned around, made his way back to the bed, sat down upon it cautiously and gripped the edge of the mattress with his hands.

Disguised, he told himself. Made into an android. Kidnaped a human and an android when he woke.

The door clicked and Herkimer said: "Good morning, sir. I trust that you are comfortable."

Sutton jerked erect. "So it was you," he said.

Herkimer nodded happily. "At your service, sir. Is there anything you wish?"

"You didn't have to knock me out," said Sutton. "This is the second time. I'm getting tired of it."

"We had to work fast, sir," said Herkimer. "We couldn't have you messing up things, stumbling around and asking questions and wanting to know what it was all about. We just drugged you and hauled you off. It was, believe me, sir, much simpler that way."

"There was some shooting," Sutton said. "I heard the guns."

"It seems," Herkimer told him, "that there were a few Revisionists lurking about, and it gets a little complicated, sir, when one tries to explain during a fight."

"You tangle with those Revisionists?"

"Well, to tell the truth," said Herkimer, "some of them were so rash as to draw their guns. It was most unwise of them, sir. They got the worst of it."

"It won't do us a bit of good," said Sutton, "if the idea was to get me out of the clutches of Trevor's mob. Trevor will have a psych tracer on me. He knows where I am and this place will be watched three deep."

Herkimer grinned. "It is, sir. His men are practically bumping into one another all around the place."

"Then why this get-up?" Sutton demanded angrily. "Why disguise me?"

"Well, sir," explained Herkimer, "it's like this. We figured no human in his right mind ever would want to be taken for an android. So we turned you into one. They'll be looking for a human. It would never occur to them to take a second look at an android when they were looking for a human."

Sutton grunted. "Smart," he said. "I hope it doesn't. . . ."

"Oh, they'll get onto it after a while, sir," Herkimer admitted, cheerfully. "But it will give us some time. Time to work out some plans."

He moved swiftly around the room, opening chest drawers and taking out clothing.

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"It's very nice, sir," he said, "to have you back again. We tried to find you, but it was no dice. We figured the Revisionists had you cooped up somewhere, so we redoubled our security here and kept a close watch on everything that happened. For the past five weeks we've known every move that Trevor and his gang has made."

"Five weeks!" gasped Sutton. "Did you say five weeks?"

"Certainly, sir. Five weeks. You disappeared just seven weeks ago."

"By *my* calendar," said Sutton, "it was ten years."

Herkimer wagged his head sagely, unstartled. "Time is the funniest thing, sir. There's just no way to make subjective and objective time come out right."

He laid clothing on the bed. "If you'll get into these, sir, we'll go down for breakfast. Eva is waiting —and will be glad to see you."

XLIII

TREVOR missed with three clips in a row. He flung the rest of them down on the desk.

"You're sure of *this*?" he asked the man across the desk.

The man nodded, tight-lipped.

"It might be android propaganda, you know," said Trevor. "They're clever. That's a thing you never must forget. An android, for all his bowing and his scraping, is just as smart as we are."

"Do you realize what it means?" the man demanded. "It means. . . ."

"I can tell you what it means," said Trevor. "From now on we can't be sure which of us are human. There'll be no sure way of knowing who's a human and who's an android. You could be an android. I could be. . . ."

"Exactly," said the man.

"That's why Sutton was so smug yesterday afternoon," said Trevor. "He sat there, where you are sitting, and I had the impression that he was laughing at *me* all the time. . . ."

"I don't think Sutton knows," said the man. "It's an android secret. Only a few of them know it. They certainly wouldn't take a chance on any human knowing it."

"Not even Sutton?"

"Not even Sutton," said the man.

"Cradle," said Trevor. "Nice sense of fitness they have."

"You're going to do something about it, certainly," said the man impatiently.

Trevor put his elbows on the desk and matched fingertips.

"Of course I am," he said. "Do you think I'd ever sit back and not do something?"

XLIV

EVA ARMOUR rose from the table on the patio and held out both her hands in greeting. Sutton pulled her close to

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him, planted a kiss on her upturned lips.

"That," he said, "is for the million times I have thought of you."

She laughed at him, suddenly gay and happy.

"Now, Ash, a *million* times?"

"Tangled time," said Herkimer. "He's been away ten years."

"Oh," said Eva. "Oh, Ash, how horrible!"

He grinned at her. "Not too horrible. I had ten years of rest. Ten years of peace and quiet. Working on a farm, you know. It was a little rough at first, but I was actually sorry when I had to leave. Except that it meant coming back to you."

He held a chair for her, took one himself between her and Herkimer.

They ate . . . ham and eggs, toast and marmalade, strong, black coffee. It was pleasant on the patio. In the trees above them birds quarreled amiably. In the clover at the edge of the bricks and stones that formed the paving, bees hummed among the blossoms.

"How do you like my place, Ash?" asked Eva.

"It's wonderful," he said, and then, as if the two ideas might be connected in some way, he added, "I saw Trevor yesterday. He took me to the mountain top and showed me the universe."

Eva drew in her breath sharply, and Sutton looked up quickly from his plate. Herkimer was waiting with drawn face, with fork poised in mid-air, halfway to his mouth.

"What's the matter with you two?" Sutton asked, offended. "Don't you trust me?"

And even as he asked the question, he answered it himself. Of course they wouldn't trust him. He was human and he could betray his own beliefs. He could twist destiny so that it was a thing for the human race alone. And there was no way in which they could be sure that he would not do this. Why should they trust a man who still felt uncomfortable and patronizing eating with an android? For he did, even now, though he was ashamed and blamed a lifetime of conditioning.

"Ash," said Eva, "you refused to. . . ."

"I left Trevor with an idea that I would be back to talk it over. Nothing that I said or did. He just believes I will. Told me to go out and beat my head against the wall some more."

"You have thought about it, sir?" asked Herkimer.

Sutton shook his head. "No. Not too much. I haven't sat down and mulled it over, if that is what you mean. It would have its points if I were merely human. Sometimes I frankly wonder how much of the human there may be left in me."

"How much of it do you know, Ash?" Eva asked, speaking softly. Her eyes questioned him.

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SUTTON scrubbed a hand across his forehead. "Most of it, I think. I know about the war in time and how and why it's being fought. I know about myself. I have two bodies and two minds, or at least substitute bodies and minds. I know some of the things that I can do. There may be other abilities I do not know about. One grows into them. Each new thing comes hard."

"We couldn't tell you," Eva said. "It would have been so simple if we could have told you. To start with, you would not have believed the things we told you. And, when dealing with time, one interferes as little as possible. Just enough to turn an event in the right direction.

"I tried to warn you. Remember, Ash? As near as I could come to warning."

He nodded. "After I killed Benton in the Zag House. You told me you had studied me for twenty years."

"And, remember, I was the little girl in the checkered apron."

He looked at her in surprise. "You knew about that? It wasn't just part of the Zag dream?"

"Identification planted by suggestion," said Herkimer. "So that you could identify Eva as a friend, as someone you had known before and who was close to you. So that you would accept her and whatever help she was allowed to offer."

"But it was a dream."

"A Zag dream," said Herkimer. "The Zag is one of us. His race would benefit if destiny can stand for everyone and not the human race alone."

SUTTON said: "Trevor is too confident. Not just pretending to be confident, but really confident. I keep coming back to that remark he made. Go out, he said, and butt your head some more."

"He's counting on you as a human being," Eva said.

Sutton shook his head. "I can't think that's it. He must have some scheme up his sleeve, some maneuver that we won't be able to check."

Herkimer spoke slowly. "I don't like that, sir. The war's not going too well as it is. If we had to win, we'd be lost right now."

"If we *had* to win? I don't understand . . ."

"We don't have to win, sir," said Herkimer. "All we have to do is fight a holding action, prevent the Revisionists from destroying the book as you will write it. From the very first we have not tried to change a single entry. We've tried to keep them from being changed."

Sutton nodded. "On his part, Trevor has to win decisively. He must smash the original text, either prevent it from being written as I mean to write it or discredit it so thoroughly that not even an android will believe it."

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"You're right, sir," Herkimer told him. "Unless he can do that, the humans cannot claim destiny for their own, cannot make other life believe that destiny is reserved for the human race alone."

"And that is all he wants," said Eva. "Not the destiny itself, for no human can have the faith in destiny that say, for example, an android can. To Trevor it is merely a matter of propaganda . . . to make the human race believe so completely that it is destined that it will not rest until it holds the universe."

"So long," said Herkimer, "as we can keep him from doing that, we can state that we are winning. But the issue is so finely balanced that a new approach by either side would score heavily. A new weapon could be a factor that would mean victory or defeat."

"I have a weapon," Sutton said. "A made-to-order weapon that would beat them . . . but there's no way that it can be used."

Neither of them asked the question, but he saw it on their faces and he answered it.

"There's only one such weapon. Only one gun. You can't fight a war with just one gun."

Feet pounded around the corner of the house. When they turned, they saw an android running toward them across the patio. Dust stained his clothing and his face was red from running. He came to a stop and faced them, clutching at the table's edge.

"They tried to kill me," he panted, the words coming out in gushes. "The place is surrounded . . ."

"Andrew, you fool," snapped Herkimer. "What do you mean by running in like this? They will know . . ."

"They've found out about the Cradle," Andrew gasped. "They know. . . ."

Herkimer came erect in one swift motion. The chair on which he had been sitting tipped over with the violence of his rising and his face was suddenly so white that the identification tattoo on his forehead stood out with startling clearness.

"They know where . . .?"

ANDREW shook his head. "Not where. They just found out about it. Just now. We still have time . . ."

"We'll call in all the ships," said Herkimer. "We'll have to pull all the guards off the crisis points . . ."

"But you can't," cried Eva. "That's exactly what they would would want you to do. That is all that is stopping them . . ."

"We have to," Herkimer said grimly. "There's no choice. If they destroy the Cradle . . ."

"Herkimer," said Eva, and there was a deadly calm in her unhurried words. "The mark!"

Andrew swung around toward her, then took a backward step. Herkimer's hand flashed under-

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neath his coat and Andrew turned to run, heading for the low wall that rimmed the patio.

The knife in Herkimer's hand flashed in the Sun and was suddenly a spinning wheel that tracked the running android. It caught him before he reached the wall and he went down into a heap of huddled clothing.

The knife, Sutton saw, was neatly buried in his neck.

XLV

"HAVE you noticed, sir," said Herkimer, "how the little things, the inconsequential, trivial factors come to play so big a part in any happening?"

He touched the huddled body with his foot.

"Perfect," he said. "Absolutely perfect. Except that before reporting to us, he should have smeared some lacquer over his identification mark. Many androids do it in an attempt to hide the mark, but it's seldom much of a success. After only a short time, the mark shows through."

"But lacquer?" asked Sutton.

"A little code we have," said Herkimer. "A very simple thing. It's the recognition sign for an agent reporting. A password, as it were. It takes a moment only. Some lacquer on your finger and a smear across your forehead."

"So simple a thing," said Eva, "that no one, absolutely no one, would ever notice it."

Sutton nodded. "One of Trevor's men?"

Herkimer nodded. "Impersonating one of our men. Sent to smoke us out. Sent to start us running, panicked to save the Cradle."

"This Cradle. . . ."

"But it means," said Eva, "that Trevor knows about it. He doesn't know where it is, but he knows about it. And he'll hunt until he finds it and then. . . ."

Herkimer's gesture stopped her.

"What is wrong?" asked Sutton.

For there was something wrong, something that was terribly wrong. The whole atmosphere of the place had grown harsh. The friendliness was gone . . . the trust and friendliness and the oneness of their purpose. Shattered by an android who had run across the patio and talked about a thing that he called a Cradle and died, seconds later, with a knife blade through his throat.

Instinctively Sutton's mind reached out for Herkimer and then he drew it back. It was not an ability, he told himself, that one used upon a friend. It was an ability that one must keep in trust, not to be used curiously or idly, but only where the end result would justify its use.

"What's gone sour?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"Sir," said Herkimer, "you are a human being and this is an android matter."

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For a moment Sutton stood stiff and straight, his mind absorbing the shock of the words that Herkimer had spoken, the black fury boiling ice cold inside his body.

Then, deliberately, as if he had planned to do it, as if it was an action he had decided upon after long consideration, he made a tight fist and swung his arm.

It was a vicious blow, with all his weight and all his strength and anger back of it, and Herkimer went down like an ox beneath a hammer.

"Ash!" cried Eva.

She clutched at his arm, but he shook her off.

HERKIMER was sitting up, his hands covering his face, blood dripping down between his fingers.

Sutton spoke to him. "I have not sold destiny, nor do I intend to sell it. Although, God knows, if I did, it would be no more than the lot of you deserve."

"Ash," said Eva softly. "Ash, we must be sure."

"How can I *make* you sure?" he asked. "I can only tell you."

"They are your people, Ash," she said. "Your race. Their greatness is your greatness, too. You can't blame Herkimer for thinking. . . ."

"They're your people, too," said

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Sutton. "The taint that applies to me applies to you as well."

She shook her head.

"I'm a special case," she said. "I was orphaned when I was only a few weeks old. The family androids took me over. They raised me. Herkimer was one of them. I'm much more an android, Ash, than I am a human being."

Herkimer was still sitting on the grass, beside the sprawled, dead body of Trevor's agent. He did not take his hands from his face. He made no sign that he was going to. The blood still dripped down between his finger and trickled down his arms.

Sutton said to Eva: "It was very nice to see you again. And thank you for the breakfast."

He turned on his heel and walked away, across the patio and over the low wall and out into the path that led down to the road.

He heard Eva cry out for him to stop, but he pretended not to hear her.

I was raised by androids, she had said. And he had been raised by Buster, a robot, not even an android. By Buster, who had taught him how to fight when the kid down the road had given him a licking. Buster, who had whaled him good and proper for eating green apples. By Buster, who had gone out, five hundred years before, to homestead a planet.

Sutton walked with the icy fury still running in his blood. They

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didn't trust me, he said. They thought I might sell out. After all the years of waiting, after all the years of planning and of thinking.

"Johnny," he said.

"What is it, Ash?"

"What's going on, Johnny? What about all this?"

"You're a stinker, Ash."

"To hell with you," said Sutton. "You and all the rest of them."

Trevor's men, he knew, must be around the house, watching and waiting. He expected to be stopped. But he wasn't stopped. He didn't see a soul.

XLVI

SUTTON stepped into the visor booth and closed the door behind him. From the rack along the wall, he took out the directory and hunted up the number. He dialed and snapped the toggle and there was a robot on the screen.

"Information," said the robot, his eyes seeking out the forehead of the man who called. Since it was an android, he dropped the customary "sir."

"Information. Records. What can I do for you?"

"Is there any possibility," asked Sutton, "that this call could be tapped?"

"None," said the robot. "Absolutely none. You see . . ."

"I want to see the homestead filings for the year 7990."

"Earth filings?"

Sutton nodded.

"Just a moment," said the robot.

Sutton waited, watching the robot select the proper spool and mount it on the viewer.

"They are arranged alphabetically," said the robot. "What name did you wish?"

"The name begins with 'S'," said Sutton. "Let me see the 'S's."

The unwinding spool was a blur on the screen. It slowed momentarily at the "M"s, spun to the "P"s, then went more slowly.

The "S" list dragged by.

"Toward the end," said Sutton, and, finally, "Hold it."

For there was the entry that he sought.

Sutton, Buster . . .

He read the planet description three times to make sure he had it firmly in his mind.

"That's all," he said. "Thank you very much."

The robot grumbled at him and shut off the screen.

Outside again, Sutton ambled easily across the foyer of the office building he had selected to place his call. On the road outside, he walked up the road, branched off onto a path and found a bench with a pleasant view.

He sat down on the bench and forced himself to relax.

He was being watched, he knew. Kept under observation, for by this time, certainly, Trevor would

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know that the android who had walked out of Eva Armour's house was actually Asher Sutton. The psych tracer long ago would have told the story, would have traced his movements and pin-pointed him for Trevor's men to watch.

Take it easy, he told himself. Dawdle. Loaf. Act as if you didn't have a thing to do, as if you didn't have a thought in mind.

You can't fool them, but you can at least catch them unguarded when you have to move.

And there were many things to do, many things left to think about, although he was satisfied that the course of action he had planned was the course to take.

He took them up, step by step, checking them over for any chance of slip-up.

FIRST, back to Eva's house to get the manuscript notes he had left on the hunting asteroid, notes that either Eva or Herkimer must have kept through all the years . . . or was it only weeks?

That would be a ticklish and embarrassing business at the best. But they were his notes, he told himself. They were his to claim. He had no commitments in this conflict.

"I have come to get my notes. I suppose you still have them somewhere."

Or—"Remember the attache case I had? I wonder if you took care of it for me."

Or—"I'm going on a trip. I'd appreciate my notes if you can lay your hands on them."

Or—

But it was no use. However he might say it, whatever he might do, the first step would be to reclaim the notes.

Dawdle up till then, he told himself. Work your way back toward the house until it's almost dark. Then get the notes and after that move fast—so fast that Trevor's gang can't catch up with you.

Second was the ship, the ship that he must steal.

He had spotted it earlier in the day while loafing at the area spaceport. Sleek and small, it would be a fast job, and the stiff, military bearing of the officer who had been directing the provisioning and refueling had been the final tip-off that it was the ship he wanted.

Loafing outside the barrier fence, playing the part of an idly curious, no-good android, he had carefully entered the officer's mind. Ten minutes later, he was on his way, with the information that he needed.

The ship did carry a time-warp unit.

It was not taking off until the next morning.

It would be guarded during the night.

Without a doubt, Sutton told himself, one of Trevor's ships, one of the fighting warships of the Revisionists.

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It would take nerve, he knew, to steal the ship. Nerve and fast footwork and a readiness and the ability to kill.

Saunter out onto the field, as if he were waiting for an incoming ship, mingling with the crowd. Slip out of the crowd and walk across the field, acting as if he had a right to be there. Not run . . . walk. Run only if someone challenged him and made the challenge stick. Run then. Fight. Kill, if necessary. But get the ship.

Get the ship and pile on the speed to the limit of endurance, heading in a direction away from his destination, driving the ship with everything that was in it.

Two years out, or sooner if necessary, he would throw in the time unit, roll himself and the ship a couple of centuries into the past.

Once in the past, he would have to ditch the motors, for undoubtedly they would have built-in recognition signals which could be traced. Unship them and let them travel in the direction he had been going.

THEN take over the empty hull with his non-human body, swing around and head toward Buster's planet, still piling on the speed, building it up to that fantastic figure that was necessary to jump great interstellar spaces.

Vaguely he wondered how his body, how the drive of his energy-intake body, would compare with the actual motors in the long haul. Better, he decided. Better than the motors. Faster and stronger.

But it would take years—many years of time, for Buster was far out.

He listed the moves:

Unshipping the engines would throw off pursuit. The pursuers would follow the recognition-signals in the motors, would spend long days in overhauling them before they discovered their mistake.

Check.

The time roll would unhook the contact of Trevor's psych tracers, for they could not operate through time.

Check.

By the time other tracers could be set in other times to find him, he would be so far out that the tracers would go insane trying to catch up on the time-lag of his whereabouts—if, in fact, they could ever find it in the vastness of the outer reaches of the galaxy.

Check.

If it works, he thought. If it only works. If there isn't some sort of slip-up, some kind of unseen factor.

A squirrel skipped across the grass, sat up on its haunches and took a long look at him. Then, deciding that he was not dangerous, it started a busy search in the grass for imaginary buried treasure.

Cut loose, thought Sutton. Cut loose from everything that holds me. Cut loose and get the job done. Forget Trevor and his Re-

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visionists, forget Herkimer and the androids. Forget Eva. Get the book written.

Trevor wants to buy me. Eva wants to use me; I'm nothing to her as a man. And the androids do not trust me. And Morgan, if he had the chance, would kill me.

The androids do not trust me.

That's foolish, he told himself. Childish.

And yet they did not trust him. You are a human, Eva had told him. The humans are your people. I'm much more an android, Ash, than I am a human being.

He shook his head, bewildered by the situation.

There was one thing that stood out clearly. One thing he had to do. One obligation that was his and one that must be fulfilled or all else would be with utterly no meaning.

There is a thing called destiny.

The knowledge of that destiny has been granted me. Not as a human being, not as a member of the human race, but as an instrument to transmit that knowledge to all other thinking life.

I must write a book to do it.

I must make that book as clear and forceful and as honest as I can.

Having done that, I shall have discharged my responsibility.

Having done that, it does not matter what may happen to me.

Having done that, there is no further claim upon me.

A footstep sounded on the path back of the bench and Sutton turned around.

"Mr. Sutton, isn't it?" said the man.

Sutton nodded.

"Sit down, Trevor," he said. "I've been expecting you."

XLVII

"YOU didn't stay long with your friends," said Trevor.

Sutton shook his head. "We had a disagreement."

"Something about this Cradle business?"

"You might call it that," said Sutton. "It goes a good deal deeper. The fundamental prejudices rooted between androids and humans."

"Herkimer killed an android who brought him a message about the Cradle," Trevor said.

"He thought it was someone that you sent. Someone masquerading as an android. That is why he killed him."

Trevor pursed his mouth sanctimoniously. "Too bad," he said. "Too bad. Mind telling me how he recognized the . . . might we call it the deception?"

"That is something," Sutton said, "that you will have to figure out without my help."

Trevor labored at acting unconcerned. "The main point is," he said, "that it didn't work."

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"You mean the androids didn't run helter-skelter for the Cradle and show you where it was."

Trevor nodded. "There was another angle to it, too. They might have pulled some of their guards off the crisis points. That would have helped us some."

"Double-barreled," said Sutton. "Very shrewd."

"Oh, most assuredly," agreed Trevor. "Nothing like getting the other fellow square behind the eight-ball."

He squinted at Sutton's face.

"Since when," he asked, "and why did you desert the human race?"

Sutton put his hand up to his face, felt the resilience of the plastic that had remodeled his features into those of another person.

"It was Herkimer's idea," he declared. "He thought it would make me hard to spot. You wouldn't be looking for an android, you know."

Trevor nodded agreement. "It might have helped," he said. "It would have fooled us for a while, but when you walked away and the tracer followed you, we knew who you were."

The squirrel came hopping across the grass and looked them over.

"Sutton," Trevor asked, "how much do you know about this Cradle business?"

"Nothing," Sutton replied. "They told me I was a human and it was an android matter."

"You can see from that how important it must be."

"I think I can," said Sutton.

"You can guess, just from the name, what it might be."

"That's not too hard to do."

"Because we needed a greater force of humans," said Trevor, "we made the first androids a thousand years ago. We needed them to fill out the too-thin ranks of Mankind. We made them as close to humans as we could. They could do everything the humans could except one thing."

"They can't reproduce," said Sutton. "I wonder, Trevor, assuming it had been possible, whether we would have given that power to them, too. If we had, they would have been true humans. There would have been no difference whatever between men whose ancestors were made in a laboratory and those whose ancestors stemmed back to the primal ocean. The androids would have been a self-continuing race, and they wouldn't have been androids. They would have been humans. We would have been adding to our population by biological as well as chemical means."

"I DON'T know," said Trevor. "Honestly, I don't. Of course, the wonder is that we could make them at all, that we could produce life in the laboratory. Think of the sheer intellectual ability and the technical skill that went into it.

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For centuries men had tried to find out what life was, had run down one blind alley after another, getting nowhere near the secret at all. Failing in a scientific answer, many of them turned back to a divine source, to a mythical answer, to the belief that it was a matter of supernatural intervention. The idea is perfectly expressed by du Nouy, who wrote back in the twentieth century."

"We gave the androids one thing we do not have ourselves," said Sutton, calmly.

Trevor stared at him, suddenly hard, suddenly suspicious.

"You. . . ."

"We gave them inferiority," said Sutton. "We made them less than human and that gave them a reason to fight us. We denied them something they have to fight to get . . . equality. We furnished them with a motive Man lost long ago, though he still has a need to feel superior to other humans for some arbitrary and unimportant difference. Once it was religion, nationality, the color of the skin. Now it's the ability to reproduce."

"They're equal now," said Trevor, bitterly. "The androids have been reproducing themselves . . . chemically, not biologically, for a long time now."

"We should have expected it," said Sutton.

"I suppose we should have," Trevor admitted. "We gave them the same brains we have ourselves. We gave them—or we tried to give them—a human perspective."

"And we put a mark upon their foreheads."

TREVOR made an angry motion with his hand. "That little matter is being taken care of now. When the androids make another android, they don't bother to put a mark upon his head."

Sutton started as the thunder hit him . . . . thunder that rolled and rumbled in his brain, a growing, painful, roaring thunder that shut out everything.

He had said a weapon. He had said there was a weapon . . .

"They could make themselves better than they were originally," continued Trevor. "They could improve upon the model. They could build a super-race, a mutant race, call it what you will . . ."

Only one weapon, Sutton had said. And you can't fight with just one cannon.

Sutton put a hand up to his forehead, rubbed hard against his brow.

"Sure," said Trevor. "You can go nuts thinking about it. I have. You can conjure up all sorts of possibilities. They could push us out. The new pushing out the old."

"The race would be human still," said Sutton.

"We built slowly, Sutton. The old race. The biological race. We came up from the dawn of Man. We came up from chipped flints and fist axe, from the cave and the

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treetop nest. We've built too slowly and painfully and bloodily to have our heritage taken from us by something to which that slowness and the pain and blood would mean not a thing at all."

One gun, Sutton thought. But he had been wrong. There were a thousand guns, a million guns, to save destiny for all life that was or would be. Now or a million-billion years from now.

"I suppose," he said, shakily, "that you feel I should throw in with you."

"I want you," said Trevor, "to find out for me where the Cradle is. You could get the androids to tell you."

"So you can smash it."

"So I can save humanity. The old humanity. The real humanity."

"You feel that all humans should stick together now."

"If you have a streak of human in you, you will be with us now."

"There was a time," said Sutton, "back on Earth, before men went to the stars, when the human race was the most important thing the mind of Man could know. That isn't true any longer, Trevor. There are other races just as great. Either actually or potentially."

"Each race," answered Trevor, "is loyal to its own. The human race must be loyal unto itself."

"I am going to be traitor. I may be wrong, but I still think that destiny is greater than humanity."

"You refuse to help us?"

"Not only that," said Sutton. "I am going to fight you. If you want to kill me, Trevor, now's the time to do it. Because if you don't do it now, it will be too late."

"I wouldn't kill you for all the worlds," Trevor assured him coldly. "I need the words you wrote. Despite you and the androids, Sutton, we'll read them the way we want them read. And so will all the other slimy, crawling things you admire so much. There's nothing in the whole universe that can stand before the human race, that can match the human race. . . ."

Sutton saw loathing on his face.

"I'm leaving you to yourself, Sutton," Trevor told him. "Your name will go down as the blackest blot in all of human history. The syllables of your name will be a sound that the last human will gag upon if he tries to speak it. Sutton will become a common noun with which one man will insult another. . . ."

Trevor stood up and started to walk away and then turned back. His voice was not much more than a whisper, but it cut into Sutton's brain like a whetted knife.

"Go and wash your face," he said. "Wash off the plastic and the mark. But you'll never be human again, Sutton. You'll never dare to call yourself a man again."

He turned on his heel and walked away. Staring at his back, Sutton seemed to hear the sound of a slamming door.

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XLVIII

THERE was one lamp lighted in a corner of the room. The attache case lay on a table underneath the lamp and Eva Armour was standing beside a chair, as if she had been expecting him.

"You came back," said Eva, "to get your notes. I have them ready for you."

He stood just inside the door and shook his head.

"Not yet," he said. "Later I will need the notes. Not right now."

And there it was, he thought, the thing he had worried about that afternoon, the thing that he had tried to put in words.

"I told you about a weapon at breakfast this morning," he went on. "You must remember what I said about it. I said there was only one weapon. I said you can't fight a war with just one gun."

Eva nodded, her lovely face drawn in the lamplight. "I remember, Ash."

"There are a million of them," said Ash. "As many as you want. There's no limit to the number there can be."

He moved slowly across the room until he stood face to face with her.

"I am on your side," he told her, simply. "I saw Trevor this afternoon. He cursed me for all humanity."

Slowly she put up a hand and he felt it slide across his face, the palm cool and smooth. Her fingers closed in his hair and she shook his head gently, tenderly.

"Ash," she said, "you washed the plastic off your face. You are Ash again."

He nodded. "I wanted to be human again."

"Trevor told you about the Cradle, Ash?"

"I'd guessed some of it," Sutton said. "He told me the rest. About the androids that wear no mark."

"We use them as spies," she said, as if it were quite a natural thing to say. "We even have some of them in Trevor's headquarters. He thinks that they are human."

"Herkimer?" he asked.

"He isn't here, Ash. He wouldn't be here, after what happened out on the patio."

"Of course," said Sutton. "Of course he wouldn't. Eva, we humans are such heels."

"Sit down," she told him. "That chair over there. You talk so oddly that you scare me."

He sat down.

"Tell me what happened," she demanded.

He didn't tell her. He said: "I thought of Herkimer this afternoon. When Trevor was talking with me. I hit Herkimer this morning and I would hit him tomorrow morning if he said the same thing to me. It's something in the human blood, Eva. We fought our

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way up. With fist, axe and club and gun and atom bomb and. . . ."

"Shut up," cried Eva. "Keep still, can't you?"

He looked up at her in astonishment.

"Human, you say," she said harshly. "And what is Herkimer if he isn't human? He *is* a human, *made* by humans. A robot can make another robot and they're still robots, aren't they? A human makes another human and both of them are humans."

SUTTON mumbled, confused. "Trevor is afraid the androids will take over. That there will be no more humans. No more original, biological humans. . . ."

"Ash," she said, "you are bothering yourself over something that there is no reason to fight. The Cradle will solve the secret of biological reproduction. Not for centuries, of course, but ultimately. What's the use of agonizing over a difference that eventually won't exist?"

He shook his head. "I guess there is no use. It keeps stirring around in my head, though, accusing me of treason. Once it was so clear and simple. I would write a book and the galaxy would read it and accept it and everything would be just fine."

"It still can be that way," she said. "After a while, after a long while. When Man stops believing that racial loyalty means the right to subjugate all other life. It will come, Ash, and humanity will be greater for it, allied to everything that lives, not an arrogant and fearful master."

"Herkimer said one weapon would do it," Sutton said. "One weapon would be the balance that was needed. Eva, the androids have gone a long way in their research, haven't they? Chemical, I mean. The study of the human body. They would have to, to do what they have done."

She nodded. "A long way, Ash."

"They have a scanner . . . a machine that could take a person apart, molecule by molecule, record it almost atom for atom. Make a blueprint for another body."

"We've done that," said Eva. "We've duplicated men in Trevor's organization. Kidnaped them and blueprinted them and made a duplicate . . . sent him back the duplicate and placed the other under benevolent detention. It's only been through tricks like that that we've been able to hold our own at all."

"You could duplicate me?" asked Sutton.

"Certainly, Ash, but. . . ."

"A different face, of course," said Sutton. "But a duplicate brain and . . . well, a few other things."

Eva nodded. "Your special abilities."

"I can get into another mind,"

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said Sutton. "Not mere telepathy, but the actual power to be another person, to be that other mind, to see and know and feel the same things that the other mind may see or know or feel. I don't know how it's done, but it must be something inherent in the brain structure. If you duplicated my brain, the ability should go along with the duplication. Not all of the duplicates would have it, maybe, not all of them could use it, but some of them could."

She gasped. "Ash, that would mean. . . ."

"YOU would know everything," said Sutton, "that Trevor thinks. Every word and thought that passes through his mind. Because one of you would be Trevor. And the same with every other person who has anything to do with the war in time. You would know as soon as they know what they're going to do. You could plan to meet any threat they might be considering. You could block them at everything they tried."

"It would be stalemate," Eva said, "and that is exactly what we want. A strategy of stalemate, Ash. They wouldn't know how they were being blocked and many times they would not know who was blocking them. It would seem to them that luck was permanently against them . . . that *destiny* was against them."

"Trevor himself gave me the idea," Sutton said. "He told me to go out and butt my head against a wall some more. He told me that finally I would get tired of doing it He said that after a while I would give up."

"Ten years," said Eva. "Ten years should do the job. But if ten won't, why, then, a hundred. Or a thousand, if it must take that long. We have all the time there is."

"Finally," said Sutton, "they would give up. Literally throw up their hands and quit. It would be such a futile thing. Never winning. Always fighting hard and never winning."

They sat in the room with its one little oasis of light that stood guard against the darkness that pressed in upon them, and there was no triumph in them, for this was not a thing of triumph. This was a matter of necessity, not one of conquest. This was Man fighting himself, and winning and losing at the same time.

"You can arrange this scanning soon?" asked Sutton.

"Tomorrow, Ash." She looked at him queerly. "What's your hurry?"

"I am leaving," Sutton said. "Running away to a refuge that I thought of. That is, if you'll lend me a ship."

"Any ship you want."

"It would be more convenient that way," he told her. "Otherwise, I'd have to steal one."

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She did not ask the question that he had expected and he went on: "I have to write the book."

"There are plenty of places, Ash, where you could write the book. Safe places. Places that could be arranged to be foolproof safe."

He shook his head. "There's an old robot. He's the only folks I have. When I was on Cygni, he went out to one of the star systems at the very edge and filed on a homestead. I am going there."

"I understand," she said, speaking very softly.

"There's just one thing," said Sutton. "I keep remembering a little girl who came and spoke to me when I was fishing. I know that she was a person conditioned in my mind. I know she was put there for a purpose, but it makes no difference. I keep thinking of her."

He looked at Eva and saw how the lamplight turned her hair into a copper glory.

"I don't know if I am still allowed to love," said Sutton. "I can't tell you for sure if I will always be allowed to love you, Eva. But I wish you would go with me out to Buster's planet."

"I can't," she cried. "Don't ask me to."

"But I must. I've suffered enough alone. I deserve you, don't I?"

Her eyes were misty in the lamplight. "Perhaps sometime, Ash, if you still want me. But there's this war that must not be lost. . . ."

Sutton said, simply: "I'll always want you, Eva. The war can't be lost any more."

She was against him, her lips to his, her words muffled and hungry. "I want to. Oh, I want to."

XLIX

SUTTON floated in a sea of light and from far away he heard the humming of the machines at work, little busy machines that were dissecting him with their tiny fingers of probing light and clicking shutters and the sensitive paper that ran like a streak of burnished silver through the holders. Dissecting and weighing, probing and measuring . . . missing nothing, adding nothing. A faithful record not of himself alone, but of every particle of him, of every cell and molecule, of every branching nerve and muscle fiber.

And from somewhere else, also far away, from a place beyond the sea of light that held him, a voice said one word and kept repeating it:

Traitor.

Traitor.

Traitor.

One word without an exclamation point. A voice that had no emphasis. One flat word.

First there had been one voice crying it and then another joined

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and then there was a crowd and finally it was a roaring mob and the sound and word built up until it was a world of voices that were crying out the word. Crying out the word until there was no longer any meaning in it, until it had lost its meaning and become a sound being senselessly repeated.

Sutton tried to answer and there was no answer nor any way to answer. He had no voice, for he had no lips or tongue or throat. He was an entity that floated in the sea of light and the word kept on, never changing . . . never stopping.

But back of the word, a background to the word, there were other words unspoken.

We are the ones who clicked the flints together and built the first fire of Man's own making. We are the ones who drove the beasts out of the caves and took them for ourselves, in which to shape the first pattern of a human civilization. We are the ones who painted the colorful bison on the hidden walls, working in the light of mud lamps with moss for wicks and animal fat for oil. We are the ones who tilled the soil and tamed the seed to grow beneath our hand. We are the ones who built great cities that our own kind might live together and accomplish the greatness that a handful could not even try. We are the ones who dreamed of stars—and broke the atom to the harness of our minds.

It is our heritage you spend. It is our traditions that you give away to things that we have made, that we have fashioned with the deftness of our hands and the sharpness of our minds.

The machines clicked on and the voice kept on with the one word it was saying.

But there was another voice, deep within the undefinable being that was Asher Sutton, a faint voice. . . .

It said no word, for there was no word that could frame the thought it formed. It made him kin to something far greater than a race of thinking, brawling, ambitious primates. It made him kin to all life . . . *all* life.

Sutton answered it: "Thank you, Johnny. Thank you very much."

And he was astonished that he could answer Johnny when he could not answer all the others.

The machines went on with their clicking.

L

HERKIMER stood alone in the darkness underneath the trees and watched the two of them walk across the field toward the ship.

She should have stayed, he thought. He would have gone without her. He would not have guessed the real reason why she should have stayed. No more than he guesses even now that we sent

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Buster out to the Tower stars many years ago to establish refuge for him—well knowing that the day might come when he would need that refuge.

She had told him at first that she couldn't go with him. She should have stuck it out, thought Herkimer. But she is too human. That is the trouble with all of us—we are too human.

Out on the tiny field, fire flickered in the mouths of the tubes and the silvery ship lurched down the launching ramp. Gathering speed, it slammed along the upcurve and hurled itself into the sky, a breath of fire that blazed against the night.

Herkimer stood with tilted head and watched it until it was a tiny pinpoint of light that was fleeing spaceward.

He lifted a hand hesitantly, half doubting the fitness of a parting gesture.

"Good-by, Ash," he said underneath his breath. "Good-by, Ash. God bless you, Eva."

Standing there, he had a hopeful thought.

Perhaps, he told himself, Sutton never will learn she is an android woman. But he knew then that Eva would tell the truth and that it would not change Sutton's love for her.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

NEXT MONTH'S CONTENTS PAGE

BOOK-LENGTH SERIAL—Installment 1

TYRANN.....*by Isaac Asimov*

NOVELETS

RULE OF THREE.....*by Theodore Sturgeon*
THE RELUCTANT HEROES.....*by Frank M. Robinson*

SHORT STORIES*

BETELGEUSE BRIDGE.....*by William Tenn*
THE PROTECTOR.....*by Betsy Curtis*
PEN PAL.....*by Milton Lesser*
SECOND CHILDHOOD.....*by Clifford D. Simak*
THE NICE GIRL WITH FIVE HUSBANDS.....*by Fritz Leiber*

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE GALAXY'S FIVE-STAR SHELF

*Short stories subject to space requirements, but at least 4 will be included.

NOTE: No article is scheduled. If you want articles, let us know how many, what kind, and on what subjects. The same applies for a letter department.

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